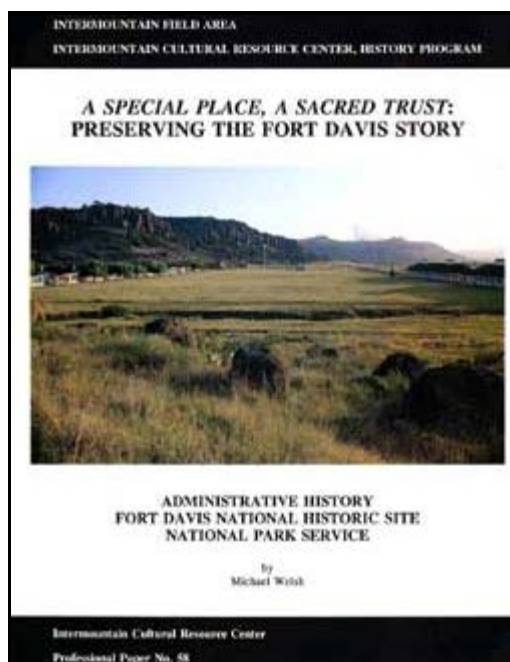


FORT DAVIS

Administrative History



A Special Place, A Sacred Trust:

Preserving the Fort Davis Story

Administrative History Fort Davis National Historic Site

Michael Welsh

1996

National Park Service
Division of History
Intermountain Cultural Resources Center
Santa Fe, New Mexico
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Like so many people who have visited and worked at Fort Davis National Historic Site, I too came to realize the park's special qualities of environment and history. I also recognized the care and attention paid to the natural and cultural resources of Fort Davis by all who have been fortunate to work there. Thus it is no surprise that the staff and management of Fort Davis gave generously of their time and expertise. Thanks are especially in order for Jerry Yarbrough, superintendent at the park who decided that Fort Davis should have an administrative history prepared. His love of west Texas, and his commitment to public service, guided the research and writing of this manuscript at every turn. In like manner, longtime staff members Mary Williams (park ranger), Susanna Liddell (administrative assistant), and Paula Bates (administrative officer), were most helpful, as were supervisory ranger Allan Morris, museum curator Elaine Harmon, and Rito Rivera.

Previous staff members who gave of their time for interviews included Kevin Cheri, Doug McChristian, Bill Gwaltney, Frank Smith, Michael Becker, John Sutton, Dale Scheier, Pablo Bencomo, John Mitchell, Ralph Russell, and Erwin Thompson. Without the commitment and energy of Robert Utley, Fort Davis might not have become a park, and thanks are in order for his delightful and candid interview. The Friends of Fort Davis were most helpful, especially Pansy Espy and Malcolm "Bish" Tweedy. Other community members supportive of the work were Gene Hendryx and Clay Miller. Regional office staff who assisted immeasurably were Doug Faris, Art Gomez, Joanne Ortiz, and Stella Moya. Special thanks go to Neil Mangum, Trans-Pecos historian for the National Park Service, whose idea it was to revive the dormant administrative history that had been attempted twice before. His knowledge of the park service's historical needs, and his love of Fort Davis, made the project all the easier to conduct. It would not be right to ignore the fine accommodations offered in the town of Fort Davis by the staff of the Hotel Limpia, whose own history is closely linked to that of the fort and the national historic site.

Anyone who undertakes historical research of this nature must remember the contributions of family members, especially when time is limited and distance is far. My daughter Jacquie admired the park the first time she saw it, and in so doing followed in the footsteps of her mother, Cindy, whose family has deep roots in far west Texas as well as property in the Davis Mountains. Cindy's stories of the beauty and grandeur of the region (not to mention the cool summer weather) allowed me to appreciate the subtle attractions of the area, and to make sure that the story of Fort Davis reflects the impressions of visitors as well as public officials. Her help with the preparation of the manuscript, in light of the birth of our son Edward during its writing, also is apparent in the text and production. Fort Davis means as much to families as it does to scholars, and ours will remember its special character for years to come.

Michael Welsh
Greeley, Colorado
May 1996

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FOREWORD

Over the past few years, attempts in producing an Administrative History for Fort Davis National Historic Site were inconclusive. That changed when I met Dr. Michael Welsh while in attendance at the 60th anniversary observance in August 1993 of White Sands National Monument. At the time, Dr. Welsh was finishing a similar volume for White Sands, and delivered the keynote address at the 60th anniversary ceremonies. Dr. Welsh impressed me with his grasp of the White Sands history, and I decided that he was the person needed to pull together the story of Fort Davis. Fortunately for Fort Davis, we were able to award him a contract to prepare the park's administrative history that follows.

The park's purpose in conducting this study was to tell the origins and development of Fort Davis National Historic Site from the time of its abandonment by the U.S. Army in 1891 until the present time. This study helps explain the reasons driving management decisions affecting the park under National Park Service (NPS) administration. It also places Fort Davis within the larger context of the community of Fort Davis, the Trans-Pecos region of West Texas, and relates the park to larger social, economic, and political issues of the United States.

In this study, Dr. Welsh captured the flavor of everything we wanted and desired as he moved through the chapters of time. The frank, personal interviews with those involved in the establishment, restoration, and preservation of the historic resources of Fort Davis have created a picture and dimension of the park that has not been seen in print. The extra research trips to Washington, DC, Fort Worth, Texas, and Denver, Colorado (not including the numerous visits to the park itself), allowed Michael to identify the story that made Fort Davis so special.

While Dr. Welsh had not visited this part of West Texas prior to initiating this contract, his wife's family has deep roots in the Davis Mountains and Permian Basin. I feel that the stories told to him by his wife, Cynthia, about her childhood memories of the area inspired Michael to a higher level. And, as Michael soon discovered, Fort Davis is indeed a very special place. If he teaches with the same degree of enthusiasm as he conducts research, his students are fortunate to have someone so excited about history. Dr. Welsh's study reflects his understanding of NPS operations and management goals, which must be balanced according to the fluctuating political mandates and regional values. In addition, his exhaustive research and synthesis of information gleaned from thousands of pages of reports and documents will help the park staff focus on present and future management decisions while providing an understanding of how the park became the place that it is.

On behalf of the park staff, I would like to extend our thanks to Dr. Welsh for his enthusiasm and desire to tell the Fort Davis National Historic Site story.

Jerry Yarbrough
Superintendent
January 1996

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Chapter One: Fort Davis and the Western Story

Standing on the parade ground of old Fort Davis, high in the Davis Mountains of far west Texas, one sees much more than the strikingly beautiful landscape of Limpia Canyon. Heralded in song and legend, the plains and mountains of west Texas (known as the Trans-Pecos region) have witnessed not only the unfolding of the saga of the American frontier. They also are home to the story of the American experience, from its precontact cultures down to the late-twentieth century. As the steward of Fort Davis National Historic Site, the National Park Service engages constantly in the discussion of the meaning of the far western frontier. In addition, its staff, volunteers, and Friends group must preserve a highly valuable architectural and historic resource to meet the needs of visitors seeking an accurate portrayal of what is often described as the "best example of the frontier military in the Southwest."

The competing forces of history and myth that suffuse the story of Fort Davis begin with the construction of the post itself, built in the heady days of the westward surge following the War with Mexico and the "rush" to the California gold fields. From the earliest encampment of American soldiers in 1854, to the re-establishment of the Army post after the Civil War (1867), to the abandonment of Fort Davis in 1891, the Davis Mountains hosted units of the Indian-fighting forces that would be enshrined in popular culture throughout the twentieth century. Yet few visitors come away from the site knowing the full impact of the ecological and human experience that marked life at Fort Davis, or of the actions taken by their public servants to guarantee to future generations access to the national treasure that the U.S. Congress in 1961 entrusted to the park service.

If one walked the 460-acre post with a history text in one's hand, one would recognize no less a spectacle than that offered by the beauty of the red cliffs and the green valley of the Limpia. Fort Davis included all the topics that have come in recent years to constitute the "new western" history: issues of race, class, gender, power, and environment. These concepts, studied for the first time in the revisionist era of the 1960s and 1970s, held that the "nation-building" story that for decades had explained the spread of American civilization across the continent had ignored or deemphasized problems caused by urbanization, modernization, and improvement of the American standard of living. For the past two decades and more the scholarly revision of the westward movement crafted a tale that would challenge prevailing assumptions of the western military and subsequent settlement. Yet the real life of the fort, as chronicled so well by park service historian Robert M. Utley, and later Robert Wooster, would one day emerge from the mists of the past to broaden the Fort Davis story. It would also provide the park service with one of its first opportunities at the end of the twentieth century to fashion a narrative of achievement and conflict that the actual inhabitants of the fort, town, and mountainous region might recognize, were they to return to the post today. [1]



Figure 1. Historic Photograph Looking South with Chapel to the left of Flagstaff (c. 1886).
Courtesy of Fort Davis NHS.

Historians of the arid West have noted the extremes of environment that differentiate the Davis Mountains region from the source of most of the westward movement's population: the humid climate of the eastern United States. At almost 5,000 feet in altitude, Fort Davis shares an ecology more akin to its western neighbors of New Mexico and Arizona, and its southern neighbor of Mexico, than it does the state in which it resides. Where east Texas boasts abundant rainfall (the city of Dallas has nearly as much annual moisture as "rainy" Seattle, Washington), which permits agriculture and urbanization on a large scale, the Davis Mountains receive only enough rain in good years to support cattle ranching and small-scale irrigated farming. Distance, isolation, aridity, and altitude have influenced all cultures that have crossed the Trans-Pecos, from the earliest precontact societies of 9000 BC to the contemporary tourists and urban expatriates who flock to Fort Davis for its cool summers and mild winters. Limpia Creek, which in Spanish means "clear," cuts through the mountains on its journey to the Pecos River basin below on lands that Spanish explorers crossed in search of gold and ancient civilizations.

Native cultures found in the Davis Mountains what still endures today: game, wood, water, and temperate weather. Migration from the settled communities to the northwest (the New Mexican village-dwellers whom the Spanish generically referred to as the "Pueblos") had reached the Trans-Pecos about a century before Coronado, but left no permanent mark on the region. More prominent were the nomadic peoples known as the "Jumanos," whom the first Spanish observed traveling through the mountain corridors on their journeys into modern-day Mexico. By 1900, the Jumanos had been assimilated into Mexican society. The Spanish also found bands of people whom they called "Apaches." Because of their ability to survive and prosper over a vast stretch of desert, canyon, and mountain terrain, the Spanish called the area "El Gran Apacheria," reaching from Austin on the east to Tucson on the west, and from Wichita on the north to Chihuahua on the south.

Of these bands, whose own names for themselves translated to "human beings" or more simply "the people," the Spanish recognized one group as frequenting the area most often; the Mescalero Apache. Named for the mescal or "agave" plant whose buds gave them energy to survive in the desert, the Mescaleros considered as their homelands an area from southern

New Mexico (modern-day Ruidoso in the Sierra Blanca) to the Pecos valley of Texas, and south hundreds of miles into central Mexico. Their cousins, the Lipan Apaches of south Texas, also passed through the Davis Mountains, as would the most feared warriors of the southern Plains, the Comanches (whose name derived from the Ute word for "enemies"). It was no coincidence that so many groups with aggressive tendencies traversed the region, given the harshness of the landscape for people with limited technology and resources. Antonio de Espejo, the first Spanish explorer to walk through Limpia Canyon (1582-83), noted the difficulty of conquest awaiting Spain if it wished to recreate in far west Texas its successes of Mexico and Peru. Thus it was no surprise that the first permanent Spanish settlement of the Southwest, the New Mexico-bound party under Don Juan de Onate, followed not Espejo's route north along the Rio Concho and Pecos River, but the more westerly Rio Grande in 1598 to the northern Pueblo communities near modern-day Santa Fe.

The story of the Spanish Southwest has been analyzed at great length, first with the "Borderlands" scholarship of Herbert Bolton in the 1920s and 1930s, and later with the "Chicano school" of the 1960s and 1970s. Each disagreed with the other's assumptions about the merits of Spanish intrusion north from Mexico; the Borderlands interpretation heralding the glamour of the conquistadors, while the Chicanos decried the elitism and violence of the soldiers, settlers, and priests. For west Texas, however, the story was more complex. No major Spanish communities were founded along the lower Rio Grande, nor were Catholic priests any more successful with proselytizing at their missions. Not until 1760 (some six generations after Onate's journey) did the Spanish appear south of modern-day Fort Davis to erect El Presidio del Norte (the present-day border town of Presidio) to protect the Guadalupe mission. Thus the Trans-Pecos region knew little of the struggles that shaped the history of New Mexico and California, where Spaniard and Native fought and accommodated each other's presence, and where both groups created the tragic legacy of victimization and the birth of "La Raza," the "new race" of mixed people that emanated from three centuries of Spanish-Indian interaction.

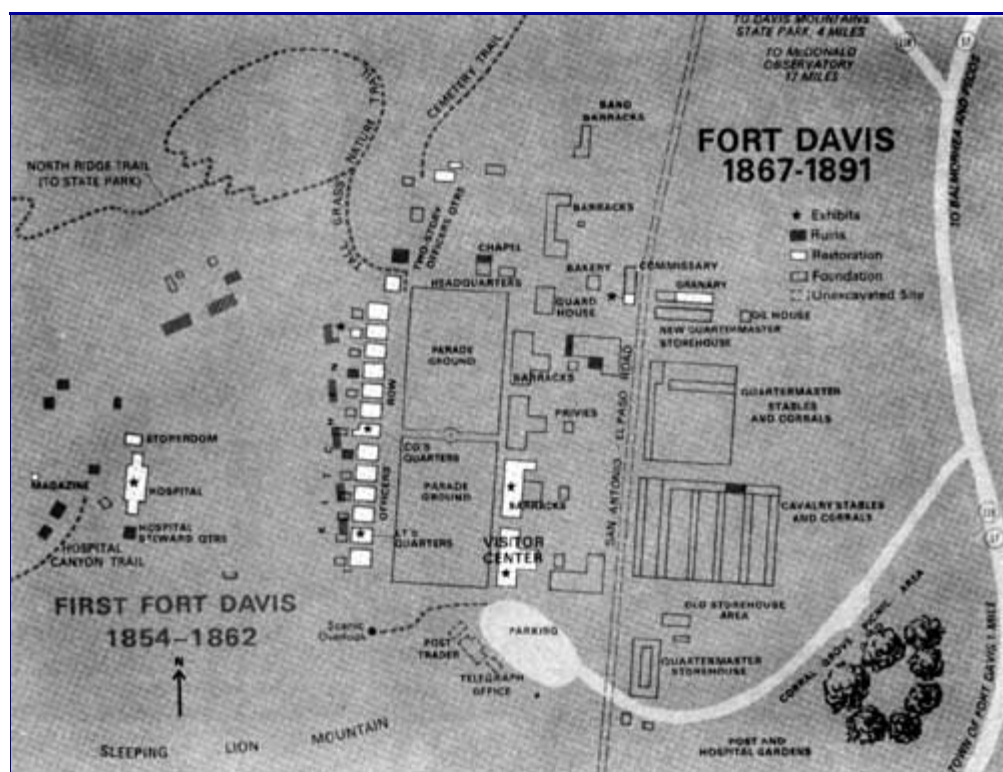


Figure 2. Fort Davis Site Map.
 Courtesy Fort Davis National Historic Site.
 (click on the map for an enlargement in a new window)

Upon the eviction in 1821 of the Spanish royal government from Mexico and the Southwest, the new leadership of the Republic of Mexico assumed control of the Trans-Pecos region. They could not, in their single generation of management of the Southwest, overcome the challenges of environment and ethnicity that had stymied Spanish royal officials. Mexico, with little money and less experience, could not carve out of the region a permanent presence to avail itself of the resources awaiting the next conqueror, the young United States of America. In 1830, Lieutenant Colonel Jose Ronquillo did petition Mexican authorities for the grant of a 2,345-square mile section of the Trans-Pecos that included the Davis Mountains and the future Fort Davis. But the impending crisis to the east, known as the Texas Revolution, drew the attention of Mexican leaders like President Antonio Lopez de Santa Ana away towards San Antonio. From the loss of the Alamo in 1836 to the declaration of Texas independence (1836), Mexico had little time to contemplate the uses of the Davis Mountains, leaving the area for the Americans to conquer and develop in the 1840s and 1850s.

That experience began within months of the arrival in 1846 of U.S. forces in the Southwest under General Stephen Watts Kearny. Kearny focused his attention on the annexation of New Mexico and the conquest of California. Following the Mexican American War, U.S. officers fanned out across the Southwest to record information for future military and civilian use. The U.S. Army, under the command of Captain William Randolph Marcy, passed one hundred miles north of the future site of Fort Davis in the fall of 1849, along what is today the route of Interstate 20. In March of that year, Marcy sent a detachment under the command of Lieutenants William H.C. Whiting and William F. "Baldy" Smith to survey West Texas. They followed an old Indian trail through a pass which they named "Wild Rose," and Whiting called the stream that flowed through the mountains "Limpia." Beyond the pass in a grove of cottonwood trees, the Whiting-Smith party stopped at what they called "Painted Comanche Camp;" the future site of Fort Davis.

The Army survey had been undertaken because of the surge of travelers through the Southwest to the California gold fields, discovered in January 1848 but not publicized until the following year. Known as the "49ers," these goldseekers took a series of routes westward, the most promising being the San Antonio-El Paso road through the Trans-Pecos. Because of its level conditions, all-weather access, and the wood and water of the Davis Mountains, the road appealed to travelers who faced more taxing routes either around South America, or across the high-walled Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada. The presence of nomadic Indian tribes in the region also required the security services of the Army, and in 1854 the War Department sent to the Davis Mountains Brevet Major General Persifor Smith to establish the first Fort Davis.

Smith had come to far west Texas to open a series of six posts, and to secure the transcontinental route of the 32nd parallel outlined by Congress in the 1853 Pacific Railway surveys. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis (for whom the fort and mountains were named) had sought a string of forts along the Rio Grande, but Smith informed his superiors that the valley was too barren and forbidding for ease of travel. By suggesting the Limpia Canyon for location of six companies of the Eighth Infantry, Smith guaranteed the presence in west Texas of military forces that would last for the next five decades. Smith began by negotiating with John James, a large landowner in the Davis Mountains, to lease to the Army 640 acres for the post, with annual rent of \$300. The government also received a purchase option to exercise within five years at \$10 per acre; an option that the Army never pursued.

Little remains of this first military site in the Davis Mountains, but official records indicate that Smith and his successors in command prior to 1860 grappled with the same conditions of environment, ethnicity, and isolation that had plagued the efforts of Spain and Mexico. In 1854 the soldiers of the 8th Infantry constructed either tents or modest "jacales" of oak and cottonwood pickers, neither of which could withstand the harshness of the west Texas winter.

Soon thereafter the troops processed lime in a kiln built some thirty miles from the fort, and also went into the Davis Mountains for lumber, which they milled on site. By 1857 the post had permanent barracks built of stone, although most structures still had a temporary look about them. Uncertainty about the final location of the Pacific railroad and access routes through the Davis Mountains kept Congress from funding Fort Davis adequately, although troop strength by the mid-1850s stood at 400, making the fort one of the West's largest.

The pre-Civil War Army never had the numbers nor funds to effect substantial change in the patterns of Indian migration or attacks upon travelers. In order to meet demands for protection with limited resources, Secretary of War Davis acquired from Congress \$30,000 for his "camel experiment," wherein the Army purchased camels from the Middle East and brought them to the American Southwest for use in the deserts. On July 17, 1857, former U.S. Navy Lieutenant Edward F. Beale led the Camel Corps through Fort Davis enroute to their posting in Arizona, and in 1859 the camels were used again to locate a more direct route from San Antonio to the fort. The experiment, despite the worthiness of the animals, failed in large measure because of costs (support of one camel corpsman was two to four times that of infantry), and because of the offensive smell and behavior of the camels. When Secretary Davis left office in 1857, the camel corps lost its chief advocate, and by the start of the Civil War the experiment had ended.

Life at the post before 1861 bore a strong resemblance to the more prominent post-Civil War Fort Davis. Stage and mail service came within one mile of the fort, with the stop known as "La Limpia." Soon thereafter, attacks upon mail trains by Mescalero Apaches had begun, and Fort Davis troops spent a good deal of time chasing them through the mountains to Mexico. Duty at the post in time of peace, however, was as boring as anywhere else in the isolated West. Officers complained about low pay, high prices caused by transportation difficulties, and the fear of wasting their careers in the middle of nowhere. Enlisted men at pre-Civil War Fort Davis were over 50 percent foreign born. According to the 1860 U.S. Census, only six of the 94 soldiers at Fort Davis came from rural backgrounds (even though the nation as a whole was only 20 percent urban). Their diet paralleled that of other frontier outposts; heavy on such high-energy substances as starch, carbohydrates, and sugars. The post commanders, with no American farms nearby, purchased fruits and vegetables from Mexico. There too went soldiers on leave for recreation, though many found the Mexican "ambiente" too exotic for their tastes. This ethnic mingling influenced the civilian community that surrounded the fort. The 1860 census revealed that 50 of the 70 residents were Hispanic, and nearly all the adults worked for the post as laundresses, laborers, servants, and stockmen.

As the nation moved by 1860 to the brink of civil conflict, the U.S. Army began removing troops from its western outposts to prepare for engagements in the East. That year Lieutenant Colonel Washington Seawell, commander at Fort Davis, asked his superiors to remove his forces to San Antonio, which the Army agreed to do. In 1860 also, voters in Texas were asked if they wished to secede from the Union. Fort Davis residents, linked politically and economically to the national government, decided 48-0 to reject secession. Unfortunately, the Texas electorate, angry not only at the demands of northerners to end slavery, but also at the failure of the Army to stop Indian raiding, decided to leave the Union. General David Twiggs, commander of the U.S. Military Department of Texas, then surrendered all army posts (including Fort Davis) in February 1861 to the Confederate States of America (CSA), and in April 1861 the Fort Davis troops began their retreat to San Antonio.

Remaining behind at the abandoned site were several Hispanic families, plus the German immigrant Anton Dietrick (known locally as "Diedrick Dutchover"), who had married into an Hispanic family and become a substantial landowner and rancher. Rebel forces surprised the Fort Davis units on the road to San Antonio, who then were captured and held until their release in 1863. Soon after abandonment, CSA recruits came to the fort to create a garrison

to protect west Texas against Indian raids, as the tribes showed no respect for the enemies of the rebel adversaries, the Union Army. By July 1861, all but twenty of the CSA troopers stationed at Fort Davis had left with Lieutenant Colonel John Baylor on his invasion of southern New Mexico and Arizona, leaving the Trans-Pecos vulnerable to attack by the Mescaleros. This in turn contributed to the embarrassing venture of August 11, 1861, when CSA Lieutenant Reuben E. Mays and his party rode out of Fort Davis only to be decimated by Mescalero Apaches.

By October of that year, the CSA could only staff Fort Davis with 62 troopers. Then in November came Brigadier General Henry H. Sibley, whose three regiments of Texas Mounted Volunteers were on their way to their ill-fated confrontation in northern New Mexico at the Battle of Glorieta Pass. Upon his defeat at the hands of a combined force of Union regulars, and New Mexico and Colorado Volunteers, Sibley again passed through Fort Davis, taking with him the remaining rebel troops. Apaches then came down out of the hills to destroy what remained of Fort Davis, driving Diedrick Dutchover and his party staying at the post to the safety of Presidio. Ironically, that last unit of CSA soldiers at Fort Davis had been predominantly Hispanic, led by Captain Angel Navarro.

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Chapter Two:

Closing a Fort, Preserving a Memory: Private Power and Public Initiative in Fort Davis, 1890-1941

When then—Senator Redfield Proctor alighted from his stagecoach in Fort Davis in the late 1880s, he observed a community and post whose future neither he nor they could predict for the coming century. At the time the chairman of the U.S. Senate Military Affairs Committee, Proctor wanted to see for himself the value of retaining Fort Davis in the post-Indian wars age. Carlyle Raht, author of *The Romance of Davis Mountains and Big Bend Country* (1918), interviewed people who remembered the eastern senator's visit a generation earlier. Wearing a top hat and frock coat more appropriate for the halls of Congress than the streets of west Texas, Proctor ignored the fact that, in the words of Raht, "up to this time, the Government had been installing modern conveniences, such as bath tubs and plumbing, in the post buildings." The Vermont senator instead "found a very dry desert country, upon which he pronounced the verdict of 'no good.'" Since no other of Proctor's colleagues would visit Fort Davis before voting for its abandonment, the town and surrounding Davis Mountains would lose the steady funding, prestige, and security that the Army had provided for nearly five decades. [1]

Thrown upon its own resources, the community of Fort Davis spent years weaning itself from the cycle of dependency that military spending created in the American West. The presence of the U.S. Army had opened the land for Anglo settlement. In addition, the purchase of beef, foodstuffs, and services for the officers and men of the fort brought steady wages at national rates; money that the thinly populated Davis Mountains could not have generated internally. The circle of ranchers around Fort Davis, whose economic and political power would grow with the absence of federal authority in the early twentieth century, might not have prospered amid the excellent grazing conditions that the mountains offered: good water, temperate climate (easily twenty to twenty five degrees cooler in summer than the surrounding Texas southern plains), and the black grama grasses that gave nourishment to cattle. Thus the forces of nature that had attracted Indians centuries before worked again to sustain the Anglo population, although the dynamics of power would shift from public to private initiative as the decades of the twentieth century progressed.

T.E. Fehrenbach, longtime historian of Texas, wrote about the meaning of the cattle business to west Texas, and its related impact upon race and class differences in the Lone Star state. "Texas, because of the Civil War," said Fehrenbach, "the interminable frontier, and the problems of the arid western half, was about two generations behind the dominant Northern tier of states in social trends and developments." These conditions of history, economics, and environment created "a tendency for the large cattle ranches of the 1870s and 1880s to consolidate and grow much larger in the next decades." Yet limited access to transportation and communication networks that crisscrossed the nation restricted the pace of change in far west Texas. Given this isolation, said Fehrenbach in his book *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans* (1985), "the whole history of Anglo-Texas was a history of conquest of men and soil, and with the closing of the last frontier no such powerful thrust and impetus could merely die." [2]

What separated Texas, especially its rural plains and mountains, from other parts of the nation was the rise of the urban-industrial society on the East Coast and around the Great Lakes. Ironically, refugees from the social and economic problems caused by that shift from farm to city in the late nineteenth-century found in the Davis Mountains a sanctuary from crime, violence, disease, and stress resulting from the rush to develop America's resources. These competing perspectives of agrarian and urban life would persist in the Davis Mountains throughout the twentieth century, even as local interests sought consensus on the creation of the Fort Davis National Historic Site. Had it not been for cities, there would have been no markets for the cattle that Texas ranchers produced. Had it not been for eastern investors, there would have been no capital to purchase land, stock, and hire labor on the great Davis Mountain ranches. Had it not been for wealthy tourists and "lungers [victims of tuberculosis and other respiratory ailments]," there would not have been the sophisticated gentry who promoted preservation of the town and its abandoned military post. And had it not been for the federal government, there would not have been the means to recapture the history of old Fort Davis for future generations to visit and admire.

It is ironic that the story of Fort Davis and its surrounding area has not been told from this angle; a phenomenon that reflects as much the maturing of the history of America (and of Texas) as it does the avoidance or denial of local citizens to delve into their storied past. A statistical analysis of the nation and of Jeff Davis County reveals patterns of economic and ethnic reality that influenced the work of Fort Davis boosters, as well as officials from the National Park Service who came several times into the Davis Mountains to weigh the merits of the area's history. What emerges are the similarities and differences between west Texas and the nation, as evidenced by Fehrenbach's contention that the Lone Star state lagged one-half century behind the country in economic and social evolution.

The last time that the U.S. census bureau sent enumerators to Fort Davis while its military post remained active was the fateful year of 1890, when Frederick Jackson Turner realized that the statistical "frontier" had "closed." The Wisconsin professor wrote that a lack of open and free land would halt the American sweep across the continent; a phenomenon to which he ascribed the nation's sense of democracy and opportunity. Turner's generalizations about this statistic ignored the fact that two-thirds of all people west of the Mississippi River in 1890 lived in communities of 2,500 or more (hardly "rural" by nineteenth century standards), or that only eight million people resided in the entire West. This created the anomaly that historian Gerald D. Nash called an "oasis civilization," which he described as people gathering in large urban centers and avoiding the isolation, distance, and harshness of the rural West. [3]

Numbers mean little without evidence of human interaction and purpose. Yet statistics for Jeff Davis County (created in 1887 out of the vast Presidio County that stretched to the Rio Grande) reveal the scale of land, and the limits of human habitation, that left the Davis Mountains outside Turner's thesis of a "lost" West. In 1890 the county had 1,922 square miles (which would expand by 1930 to 2,263 square miles). Its total population was 1,394 (a density of three-quarters of a person per square mile), of whom 558 were women and 836 were men; a ratio not uncommon in military communities surrounded by ranches (both of which were populated primarily by men). In terms of racial and ethnic backgrounds, Jeff Davis County in 1890 had 37 blacks still remaining, despite the departure five years earlier of the black Army units, which had secured the Davis Mountains for Anglo control. Far more prominent were Hispanics, whom the census had yet to differentiate statistically (this would not occur systematically until 1970). Under the category of "foreign born," Mexico claimed 270 residents of Jeff Davis County, with other countries only in single figures. Native-born Hispanics were identified as "white" for census purposes, although that would not be the social definition in Texas or the Davis Mountains. [4]

Starting in 1900, patterns of change and continuity without the influence of the Army became quite apparent in the census data. The county's population fell 17.5 percent (to 1,150), while the state of Texas grew 36.4 percent (to three million). Nearly all of Jeff Davis County's decline came among "whites" (down from 1,352 in 1890 to 1,107 in 1900). Blacks increased to 43 that year, and more striking was the rate of black literacy. Two-thirds of black adult males were literate in 1900, while only 48 percent of Anglo and Hispanic males could read and write. The overall male-female ratio had also closed by then, with the county having 642 men and 508 women of all ages. Family size had also grown to 4.4 persons, a figure still less than the Texas average of 5.1 members in a statistical family. [5]

What these numbers seemed to reflect was the natural decline of the Davis Mountains population base caused by the closure of the post, along with the stabilization of sex ratios, family size, and balance of ethnic groups brought to the area by military service and support. But the emergence of the cattle kingdom mentioned by Fehrenbach also accelerated in the early twentieth century, as families expanded their acreage and their power in the community. Lucy Miller Jacobsen and Mildred Bloys Nored, authors of *Jeff Davis County, Texas* (1993), noted how "after 1880, Southerners moved into Jeff Davis County to challenge the northern, Republican, federal influence" created by the fort. "Jobs at Fort Davis became progressively scarce" in the 1890s, as the national economy sank with the Panic of 1893. "Many Hispanic families," said Jacobsen and Nored, "as well as others, moved to Shafter to work in the mines," while railroad construction around Alpine and Marfa drew still more Fort Davis families and individuals. Sealing the fate of many was Mother Nature, which in 1891 brought "an exceedingly dry year followed by a bitter winter." [6]

The same aridity that contributed to what local rancher Clay Miller called in 1995 the "highly cyclical" nature of the west Texas cattle business, provided a haven for urbanites with respiratory illnesses, and also for east Texans who contracted humid-climate diseases like malaria. Jacobsen and Nored spoke of the arrival in the 1890s of "health seekers," whose physicians prescribed the dry air and high altitude of places like Albuquerque and Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Colorado Springs and Denver, Colorado. When these patients and their families came to the Davis Mountains, they found few accommodations for their indefinite recuperation. The grounds of the fort thus became their lodging, where the "lungers" shared space with Hispanic families who could not afford housing in town, and with "expectant mothers [from surrounding ranches who] waited out their terms there with friends or relatives." For a time a recovered tuberculosis patient, William Pruett, built a tent sanatorium five miles north of the fort, and also housed lungers' families in tents east of town. Health care thus created economic opportunity in the Fort Davis area, as did the arrival after 1900 of people whom Jacobsen and Nored called "the wealthy of pre-air conditioned Houston and Galveston [who] discovered Fort Davis as a summer retreat." They built expensive homes with wide, screened porches along Court Street, hired servants from the surrounding area, and created a life that the locals referred to as "Millionaire's Row." [7]

More evidence of this stability in the Fort Davis community came in the late 1880s, when ministers of several Protestant denominations came to the Davis Mountains to preach to the soldiers, their families, and the ranching community. The most prominent of these was Dr. William B. Bloys, born in Tennessee in 1847 and a graduate of the famed Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio. Reverend Bloys and his wife first came to Coleman, Texas, where for nine years he ministered to that rural community. In 1888 he too came to the Davis Mountains for his health, spending 29 years as the representative of the Presbyterian faith in the area. Because he had no church at first, Reverend Bloys used the chapel at the fort, and because he had no congregation he rented a buckboard and rode around town inviting children to Sunday school and adults to the service. Indicative of the multiracial character of Fort Davis was the receptive audience that Bloys found among Hispanics, whom the minister reached through the translations of Robert Fair, a black veteran who remained in town after

the departure of the black units and who served as custodian of the post in the early 1890s. Equally important was Bloys' outreach to ranching families with his annual summer campmeeting, which served as much a function of social gathering as it did religious instruction and worship. [8]

It was people like Bloys who set about to change the character of the town of Fort Davis, and to adjust the community to the departure of the military. In a story written in 1963 entitled, "History of the First Presbyterian Church of Fort Davis, Texas," the unidentified author called Fort Davis in the 1880s "a lawless frontier town." Among the forces contributing to "its unsavory reputation" were "the vast distance from centers of civilization," the "general turbulence and disorder of the post-Civil War days," the unruly garrison of Negro soldiers," the "recent arrival of cattlemen and other pioneers, many of them literally a law unto themselves," and most distressing, "the presence of nine wide-open saloons!" The Presbyterian church took credit years later for the "steady and persistent influence" that brought "gradual change to a law-abiding community." By imparting piety and rectitude to the area, the Protestant ministers also changed the social and racial dynamics of Fort Davis, in ways that could be seen statistically and anecdotally by the early twentieth century. [9]

The most dramatic demographic change of the early twentieth century came with the departure of black citizens by the 1920s. Even though Jeff Davis County had fewer than two persons per square mile in 1910, the population had rebounded by 46 percent (to 1,678). There had been a decline of nearly one hundred people from "Precinct 1," which encompassed the town of Fort Davis. Yet the western side of the county (Precinct 4), including the ranching areas and the new railroad center at Valentine, had grown from 62 people in 1900 to 606 a decade later, increasing by a factor of ten. The number of blacks grew slightly from 43 to 47, and were now divided by the census enumerators between the category of "black" (12) and "mulatto," or mixed (35). This made the county four percent black, while the state of Texas was 17.7 percent black that year. Of the foreign born, 292 came from Mexico, and only 15 from Germany (the largest European producer of immigrants). Indicative of the county's deviation from national standards, however, was the statistic on education. Whereas the nation pushed for compulsory attendance under the directions of Progressive reformers like John Dewey, only 44 percent of all school-age children in Jeff Davis County were in attendance in 1910 (by comparison, five of the county's seven black children went to school). [10]

Jeff Davis County changed yet again in the turbulent years of 1910-1920, with the international crisis of World War I creating both opportunities and problems for community maintenance. Farmers and ranchers nationwide were encouraged to "plant from fence to fence for national defense;" a reference to food production for consumption at home and in war-torn Europe. Yet the need for manpower in uniform drew away able-bodied youth everywhere, with many not to return to their rural roots. These factors joined in Jeff Davis County with the outbreak in 1910 of the Mexican Revolution, which was marked by the threat of violence (both real and imagined), and the flight of Mexican citizens northward across the border to seek shelter and employment in American industry and agriculture. This volatility would result in the loss of nearly 12 percent of the county's population (to 1,445) from 1910-1920. Most striking was the departure of blacks, down from 47 to eight (a loss of 87 percent). Illiteracy rates more than doubled from 9.6 percent in 1910 to 20.9 percent in 1920, with white illiteracy at 11.6 percent and foreign born (primarily Hispanic) at 50.8 percent. [11]

Driving this demographic change, and hence the lifestyles of Jeff Davis County residents, was the expansion of large ranches in the Davis Mountains. In 1900 the census bureau had found 48 farms and ranches; in 1910 this had nearly doubled to 91. By 1920 the number had receded by almost one-third, to 62. Thirty-eight of these farms and ranches (over 60 percent)

were 1,000 acres or larger, while only ten (16 percent) were 100 acres or less. The average size of these ranches (large and small alike) was 14,958.9 acres, with average dollar value in 1920 at \$7.625 million (double 1910's amount of \$3.73 million despite fewer farms and ranches). Most revealing of the concentration of power in the hands of large ranchers by 1920 was the total value of cattle: \$2.36 million of the \$2.42 million (or 98 percent) for all agricultural production in the county. [[12](#)]

The decade of the 1920s was marked nationwide by the statistical "victory" of urban areas over the historical dominance of rural America. For the first time since the census was taken in 1790, cities possessed the majority of all residents (52 percent to be exact). The political power of rural legislators was thus in jeopardy, as the U.S. Constitution dictated apportionment of congressional representation based upon percentages of population. Because rural interests did not want to surrender power to their city cousins, they blocked for the only time in history the reapportionment of congressional districts, so that they would not be outvoted in the nation's capital. Other manifestations of the rise of urban America were the car culture, the entertainment industry (especially Hollywood and the movies), and cultural interaction between blacks and whites in American cities (at once accommodationist and separatist with the coming of the "Jazz Age" and the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan).

From 1920-1930, Texas grew at a pace equal to that of the nation (24.9 percent). This decade saw the rise of urban Texas, with all its attractions and temptations. In Jeff Davis County, the pattern was mixed, as the first five years of the "Roaring 20s" witnessed dramatic migration from outside. The accessibility of the county by car, the open space, and the improved national economy led the county to grow overall by 24.6 percent (nearly the state and national average). Precinct 1 (the town of Fort Davis) grew by 200 people (to 912, or 28 percent). For the first time in the census, the federal government in 1930 tried to enumerate Hispanics separately from "whites," calling them "Mexicans;" a term that many would repudiate because of the pejorative use of the word by Anglos in the Southwest, and one which the census bureau would discard thereafter until the 1970 enumeration. Yet because of that momentary usage, Jeff Davis County was found to have 1,046 people of "other races," mostly Mexican, for a total of 58 percent Hispanic, 40 percent white, 1.1 percent black (20 people, of whom 18 lived in Fort Davis), and the rest from other nationalities. [[13](#)]

This growth rate, and its concomitant ethnic dimensions, contributed to the rise in illiteracy in the county (up to 30.7 percent from 1920, or an increase of one-third, even faster than the population growth rate as a whole). For native whites, the rate was less than one percent, making nearly the entire increase a function of Hispanic migration. Ten of the fourteen black adults were also illiterate, and nearly all worked in categories of common labor or domestic service. The primary reason for this continued disparity in income and race was the expansion of local ranches, up nearly 30 percent from 1920 (to an average of 18,256 acres). Over 97 percent of all county land (1.784 million acres) was in pasturage in 1930, and nearly 98 percent of that (1.773 million acres) was on ranches of 5,000 acres or more (a doubling of large ranches since 1920). One quirk in the farm and ranch statistics from 1920-1930 was the short-lived attempt of small owners and tenants to gain a foothold in the Davis Mountains. The census bureau analyzed the health of the agricultural economy in mid-decade, and found that the number of county farms and ranches had more than doubled (from 62 to 128), with farm/ranch size shrinking seven percent (to 13,484 acres). Total farm value grew by more than a factor of three in those five years (from \$5. 161 million to \$16.778 million), with the average farm or ranch in Jeff Davis County in 1925 worth nearly 60 percent more than 1920 (\$131,079). [[14](#)]

The prosperity of the Twenties did not continue, either nationally or in the Davis Mountains, as the collapse in 1929 of the New York stock market resonated throughout the economy in the desperate years of the Great Depression (the 1930s). Across the country, the value of

agricultural production fell over 50 percent, stock prices dropped nearly 90 percent, and by the winter of 1932-1933 the adult unemployed population stood at 33 percent (with an additional 33 percent listed as "underemployed" with fewer hours, wages, or both). Jeff Davis County would suffer along with the rest of America in these years, although the population data was not as conclusive. The 1940 census report found 2,375 people in the county, up nearly 32 percent, and the density finally broke the county's one person per square mile (still half of Turner's "frontier" diagnosis of two generations earlier). The town of Fort Davis fell from 912 people to 537 (over 40 percent), while the northeastern quadrant of the county grew by a factor of six (from 106 to 652). Precinct 3 (the southeastern county) grew from 57 in 1930 to 481 (900 percent), and the growth in far west Jeff Davis County led to incorporation in 1936 of the town of Valentine (499 people, or nearly 92 percent that of Fort Davis). [15]

Population movement seemed to reflect the ability of the large ranchers to maintain their levels of employment, even though the value of their holdings (land and stock) dropped along with the national totals. The value of cattle in the county fell over 60 percent (to \$1.8 million), and all stock declined nearly 40 percent (to \$2.257 million), even as the number of farms and ranches grew slightly (from 99 in 1930 to 104 in 1940). One indicator of the meaning of this change was the collapse of the modest fruit and vegetable production of Jeff Davis County: down to a mere \$20,250 in 1940 (from \$52,676, or a decline of 64 percent). There were in 1939 a total of 25 farms and ranches that sold or traded less than \$250, while there were 23 ranches that sold/traded over \$20,000 each. The 22 poorest farms and ranches did a mere \$2,514 in business combined, while the 30 richest ranches transacted \$ 1.424 million in 1939, for an average of \$47,000 per ranch. By comparison, the national minimum wage for hourly labor was 25 cents, and the per capita income for all Americans in 1933 was \$400. Thus the poorest quarter of Jeff Davis County farms and ranches produced less than three-fifths of the national average for income, while the wealthiest third produced on average 420 times that amount. [16]

The disparity of wealth and poverty plaguing Jeff Davis County in the years between the first and second World Wars explained in part the federal government's belief that it had a duty to redress the economic grievances of the Great Depression. Until 1920, most Americans had encountered government primarily through postal clerks, law enforcement officers, and perhaps military service. T.E. Fehrenbach noted how that war had destabilized the urban and farming sectors of the Lone Star state, and how advances in technology (especially the automobile) transformed the landscape. "Texas went from a horse culture to something resembling an automobile culture in one swoop, " said Fehrenbach, as "roads hastened economic improvements, urbanization, and school consolidation in almost every region of the state." This process of urbanization (Texas by 1933 was 67 percent rural, closing the gap with the national pattern of 41 percent rural population),"began to drain off some of the misery from the cotton fields." Then the twin ravages of economic collapse and the environmental disaster of the "Dust Bowl," where the southern Plains lost much of their topsoil to winds and the overplowing of new land, created the diaspora from the region to California and the Far West more heralded in John Steinbeck's novel about "Okies" on the "Route 66," *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). [17]

Local residents of Fort Davis could not have predicted these conditions when in 1910 they hosted their annual Independence Day celebration. On that Fourth of July, the parade boasted no fewer than 25 automobiles, even though there were no paved roads into the Davis Mountains. The state would not build a highway yard in the county until after World War I, prompted by passage in 1916 of the Federal Highway Act, whereby the U.S. government would construct a series of paved roads across the country to expedite commercial and military travel. This did not deter the creation also in 1910 of the Fort Davis "Improvement Club," whose duty it was to promote economic development in the region. Its literature, and that of the *Fort Davis Dispatch* (begun in 1911), mentioned prominently the environmental

pleasantness of the Davis Mountains, especially drawing attention to the 5,000-foot altitude of the town. [18]

Dramatizing the prospects of a western town was not a new idea, as communities like Los Angeles had grown exponentially in the early twentieth century through a combination of transportation, communications, climate, and advertising. Fort Davis, like its peers throughout the West, hoped that growth could create new jobs, promote land sales, and improve the quality of life in an isolated region. This urge to advertise one's way to economic health had its parallels in the Davis Mountains with the appearance of Carlisle G. Raht, who had visited the area with his father in the summers when he was young. Raht moved to Fort Davis in 1916, determined as a graduate of the University of Texas to write a dramatic story of the "old" West like he had heard from his professors in history. The Austin school in the early twentieth century had become a center for regional study, among whose graduates were J. Frank Dobie, the noted folklorist of tall tales and legends of the Southwest; Herbert Eugene Bolton, a Wisconsin native who admired the stories of Spanish occupation of the area, and who at the University of California would create the "Borderlands thesis" of Spanish history; and Walter Prescott Webb, best known for his pathbreaking study *The Great Plains* (1931), written in the depths of the Depression and the start of the Dust Bowl about the struggle of farmers and ranchers to control the environment of the West. Raht wanted to find his version of all three stories (folklore, Spanish conquest, and cowboy culture) in the Davis Mountains, and his efforts went far to demonstrate to outsiders the distinctiveness of the area, if not their actual history and tradition.

Raht's endeavors were aided by the research of a young reporter named Barry Scobee, whom Raht had met by chance in 1917 in the newsroom of the *San Antonio Express*. Scobee, who had grown up on a Missouri farm dreaming of writing history, asked Raht if he could make a living in the Davis Mountains about which Raht spoke so glowingly. Scobee was described in later years as a "mild-spoken little fellow with a bald head, a good heart, and a sincere likeable character that charmed everyone." Upon his return to Fort Davis, Raht corresponded with Scobee, offering him the opportunity to manage the Hotel Limpia, opened in 1912 to serve the wealthy summer visitors to the area. The constraints of wartime limited the Limpia's income, and by extension Scobee's, and he and his wife Katherine survived only because Raht hired the former reporter to "travel over the area with him in an old flivver to gather material for his book." Scobee volunteered for service in World War I, only to report to basic training as the war ended in Europe. He and his wife left the Davis Mountains for opportunities in the Pacific Northwest, and returned in 1925 with the intention of selling stories to popular magazines about the glamour and drama of the old Southwest. [19]

The book that Raht and Scobee compiled fit the pattern of excitement and action that gripped audiences' imaginations in the post-World War I era. It also served as the history text for many local residents and visitors, who were fascinated with Raht's stories of derring-do, conquest, outlaws, bandits, and the like. Raht furthered the importance of his work by claiming in the preface: "In gathering my data I have attempted to eliminate the personal viewpoint of the narrator, as well as of myself." He declared that he had "written out of sheer love of the country and a great admiration and respect for the hardy pioneers who had conquered it." Adding to the book's "authenticity," and perhaps its historical irony, was Raht's acquisition of historical documents on the Spanish era (1540-1821) from the "Archivo General Nacional," or National Archives in Mexico City. He then asked Henry O. Flipper, the young black lieutenant court-martialled at Fort Davis in 1881 and now a mining engineer in El Paso, to translate the Spanish documents. [20]

Raht proceeded to describe Hispanic Texas in the most derogatory terms imaginable. In so doing he merely echoed the sentiments of the day among Anglo Texans, and reinforced local opinion on the inferiority of Hispanics (all of whom were called "Mexicans," even if they

were natives of the United States and were considered "white" for census purposes). He also highlighted the class differences of Jeff Davis County by calling the great ranchers "a people who have never felt the cramping littleness of more thickly settled communities." Raht concluded that the ranchers were "literally 'monarchs of all they survey, "'ignoring their own dependence upon eastern markets, investors, technology, and also low-paid wage labor provided by Hispanics. [21]

What made Raht's negative characterization of Hispanics even more important was their "majority-minority" status in town and throughout west Texas. T.E. Fehrenbach wrote that "the Texan attitude toward Hispanic Americans, born out of long and unhappy experience with Mexico, was not essentially hostile; it was rather one of considered domination." After 1900 the Anglo power structure in Texas encouraged blacks to migrate elsewhere, and replaced their work with Mexicans because "the cost of land, irrigation, and crushing freight charges could only be met by using labor cheaper than any other in the United States." These economic imperatives, coupled with the political control that west Texas ranchers had in their communities, meant that "every major social change that came in the twentieth century was forced upon the state of Texas by outside pressures." [22]

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FORT DAVIS

Administrative History



Chapter Three:

The New West Meets the Old: Creating Fort Davis National Historic Site, 1941-1961

While the Second World War redefined America in a thousand ways, the relationship between public initiative and private power in the Davis Mountains remained constant. From 1941-1960, local interest committed to creation of a national park at Fort Davis attempted to identify the financial means to acquire the post property and preserve its story. In addition, the local economy failed to expand with that of the nation as a whole, leaving the youth of Fort Davis little choice but to seek their futures elsewhere. What did change were political attitudes in the Texas congressional delegation, national sentiment for historic preservation, and the decision by the National Park Service after World War II to examine more closely the significance of the Davis Mountains' abandoned military post. Yet it would require a serendipitous sequence of political events to bring Barry Scobee's dream to life, and even then local boosters would wonder at times what exactly they had accomplished.

Economically, World War II revitalized the United States as Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal social welfare programs had not. Gerald D. Nash wrote in *World War II and the West: Reshaping the Economy* (1991) about the stunning federal investment in military hardware, uniformed personnel, and support services from 1941-1945. Whereas the nation had faced in 1933 an unemployment rate of nearly one-third of the adult work force, by 1939 that statistic still hovered around 20 percent; this despite federal spending on such programs as the park service's CCC camps and the creation of new parks. Yet the imperatives of national security, coupled with the costs of a "high-tech" war against the Axis powers (Germany and Japan), led FDR to spend some \$260 billion to prosecute the Allied effort. This translated into lavish expenditures in urban and rural areas of the country for military installations, defense plants, and the like. By 1945 southern California, for example, had garnered \$45 billion of that amount, with smaller percentages going to other cities on the East and West Coasts, the Great Lakes, and the desert Southwest. Unemployment as a result of this federal investment dropped to a statistically insignificant one percent, and postwar planning attempted to maintain both that prosperity and the source of funding that had made it possible. [1]

In the years after the war, the nation's economy would pursue a mixture of public and private spending linked to military preparedness called the "Cold War" (the struggle between American democracy and Russian Communism), and the consumerism triggered first by pent-up demand for goods and services, then by the staggering population growth known as the "Baby Boom." Landon Jones wrote in *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation* (1980) about the linkage between growing families in the postwar years, their increased standard of living, and the quest for comfort and security that included tourism and eventually settlement in the "Sunbelt" region of the South and West. Cities became places to earn a living, while the suburbs attracted the housing of these new families. They in turn sought escape from both settings in tourism and recreation, creating the statistic in 1954 that one American in three would visit a national park that year; up from merely one in sixteen at the beginning of the park system four decades earlier. Hitting the road, seeing America's wonders, and absorbing the complexity of the nation's past became goals for millions of

citizens, and every town with some natural or historical attraction engaged in the quest for visitor dollars as well as conventional economic expansion. [2]

This shift of emphasis to mobility and leisure should have eased the path of supporters of park status for Fort Davis. So too should have been the essential conservatism of the nation from 1941-1960. Michael Kammen noted how the shared purpose of the war, plus the economic "miracle" stimulated by so vast a program of federal spending for national security, forced promoters of New Deal historical and cultural programs to reassess their themes. "If cultural relativism implied moral relativism," said Kammen of the more controversial New Deal agencies, "both would have to be discarded in favor of a traditionally defined idealism." Then after 1945, "older and individualized crafts looked attractive in an age of standardization. The calm of rustic museum villages looked desirable in an age of intense bustle." From this Kammen recognized yet another series of competing emotional forces at work on American historical memory: "The common denominators in postwar statements of mission stressed their educational objectives and their desire to preserve oases of the pastoral, pre-industrial past at a time of startling technological change." [3]

As it had prior to 1945, Jeff Davis County did not move in the directions of the rest of America in the postwar era. Pablo Bencomo and his peers from Fort Davis left town for service in the nation's armed forces, traveling the world and learning of the opportunities, and in Pablo's case, the freedoms awaiting people of all colors and classes elsewhere in the United States. Within the county, opportunity shrank as the fledgling tourism industry, cultivated so assiduously by the Mile High Club and funded by public revenues, collapsed with travel restrictions and the movement of young men and women into uniform or defense industries far away. Jacobsen and Nored recounted how the Davis Mountains State Park's Indian Lodge was forced to close for lack of patrons, only to reopen when "wives of cadets stationed at the Marfa Air Base were housed [there] after literally all available housing was utilized." Without visitors, federal programs, or donors willing to fund park creation, Fort Davis endured the war with little hope of tempering the forces that for a generation had limited its options. [4]

Statistics for the years 1941-1960 reinforce this cycle of isolation and decline for Jeff Davis County; conditions that the park service commented upon at length when asked in 1953 and 1960 to study the feasibility of a park at the abandoned post. The county's population fell in 1950 by 12 percent from the prewar census (from 2,375 to 2,090). This pattern became more evident when the four voting precincts were counted. Precinct 1 (the town of Fort Davis) had grown 14 percent (from 537 to 623); yet the village remained 32 percent smaller than it had been in 1930. Precinct 2 (the northeastern quadrant of the county) had dropped the most in ten years, from 652 people to 450 (off 31 percent), and Precinct 3 in the southeast declined 24 percent (from 481 to 368). Even Precinct 4, southwest of town and site of the "Valentine boom" of 1930-1940, lost population by eight percent. [5]

What these numbers meant for social and economic conditions in wartime Jeff Davis County was validation of Jacobsen and Nored's comment that "many youngsters moved away to find work elsewhere." The median income for the county in the 1940s was \$1,773, or 78 percent of the Texas average. Fifty-four percent of all county families earned less than \$2,000, itself an amount one-sixth below the state standard. Educational achievement for county adults in 1950 was a mere 7.8 years. This may explain the fact that 47 percent of all adults employed in the county in 1950 were classified as farm laborers. In matters of race, the census that year still counted Hispanics as "whites," but the black population had grown from 18 in 1940 to 26 in 1950; an increase of 31 percent, and a number of blacks greater than had resided in the county for a generation. [6]

By 1960 the statistical profile of Jeff Davis County had changed little, even as the successful

movement for creation of Fort Davis National Historic Site got underway. The population base fell again by 24.3 percent; down from 2,090 in 1950 to 1,582 a decade later, the lowest number in 40 years. Population density slipped to 0.7 per square mile, against a national average in 1960 of over 30 people per square mile. These numbers translated into a depressing loss of 16.2 percent of all families in the "family-conscious" era of the Fifties. Unemployment numbers were also included for the first time in general county census data, and Jeff Davis County had 10 percent of its adults out of work. Education had not improved at all in ten years, again leveling at 7.8 years per adult. This statistic is striking in comparison to the national emphasis on schooling, triggered in the late 1950s by the Russian space launch "Sputnik," the baby boom, and the advancing complexity of the marketplace. The average American adult had by the year 1959 a 12th grade education, rendering Jeff Davis County some 35 percent below the nation's standard of learning. This also translated to median income, at \$3,877 in 1960 only 79 percent of the Texas average (\$4,884). More than one worker in three earned less than \$3,000 (or \$1.50 per hour, when the minimum wage was \$1.25 per hour), which meant that 34.5 percent of Jeff Davis County workers received but 61 percent of the Texas median income. Finally, this pattern of decline affected the black population of the county. Census enumerators in 1960 could find only one black resident in Jeff Davis County (a loss of 96 percent since 1950). This may explain in part the confusion in the minds of local residents when the NPS historians sent to Fort Davis not only discovered in the federal records the importance of the black units to the post's history. This was manifest, in the words of Southwest Region historian Robert M. Utley, when county residents referred to the U.S. Army regulars as "nigger soldiers," even as they revered the white officers in command. [7]

In spite of these conditions, the Mile High Club kept to its goal of park status for Fort Davis; a dream that they hoped would come true in 1945 when local rancher Mac Sproul purchased for \$16,000 the 640-acre site of the old military post. This was half the amount that the club had asked of the Texas Centennial Commission a decade earlier, and \$9,000 below the price quoted to Judge Davidson a mere four years earlier by the James family. Sproul's acquisition brought ownership closer to town, and allowed local interests to seek alternative funding strategies. These emerged the following year (1946), when a Houston attorney, D.A. Simmons, offered Sproul \$25,000 for 453.9 acres for the land encompassing the ruins of the old fort. Simmons had achieved an impressive career in the law, including service as an advisor to U.S. Senator Tom Connally (D-TX), to the fledgling international peacekeeping body, the United Nations, and in 1945 as the president of the prestigious American Bar Association (ABA). A magazine section of the *Houston Chronicle* claimed in 1956 that Simmons had first come to the Davis Mountains in 1902 with his father, assistant Texas attorney general D.E. Simmons. Supposedly the elder Simmons had "acquired" the fort "for his son . . . who was then five years old." Whatever the source of this information, the younger Simmons and his wife, the former Elizabeth Daggett, spent 30 years traveling to historic sites around the country, and it was their love of the past, said Simmons' widow in 1966, that "influenced his determination to do something about Fort Davis." [8]

The arrival of the Simmons family brought money and attention to the post that had been missing before the war from the efforts of Barry Scobee and the Mile High Club. The Houston lawyer organized the "Old Fort Davis Company," attracting as shareholders the business elite from town. Simmons told the *Houston Magazine* in February 1947 that he sought a "dual purpose of preserving this historical spot and for furnishing vacation homes for the ever-growing number of health and pleasure seekers who are at last learning of the scenic beauty and the health producing quality of the high, pure mountain air, both of which nature has so generously allocated to Jeff Davis." The new owner hired Dude Sproul and several other local residents to build a fence around the property, fill in the abandoned wells, erect a gate at the entrance, and convert "one of the old barracks into an information center and trading post. "The officers' quarters across the parade grounds would become "modern

tourist apartments," said the *Houston Magazine*, and "most of the old buildings erected of adobe clay will be destroyed." Encouraging news to Simmons and the Mile High Club was "the reported plan of Dallas capital to build a fine resort near the 8,000 foot Mt. Mitre, which is only a scant dozen miles from Fort Davis." This would be proof to the outside world that the post and its environs could become "a gathering place of those who, in the summers to come will bask in the ever present sunshine and drink in the rare beauty and the pure air of 'mile high' Texas." [9]

Through his Old Fort Davis Company, Simmons was true to his word. He brought to the Mile High Club a sophisticated vision of promoting the post that included advertising in area newspapers in June 1947 about the dedication ceremonies for the completion of the 75-mile Scenic Loop Highway. The locals now had funds to print handbills that offered no less than eight reasons to stop in town, among them "The Old Fort Davis Riding Stables," managed by Ben Lotspeich; Hospital Canyon; "Indian Emily's Grave;" and "The Historic Ruins," which promised visitors the site "where Indian Emily died, and where the first Christmas tree in West Texas was set up in 1867," The source of much of this information was the Simmons-subsidized printing of Barry Scobee's book, *Old Fort Davis*, which incorporated all the legends and stories that the county Justice of the Peace had collected in his thirty years in town. The *San Antonio Express* took note of Scobee's work, and legitimized its place in the history of west Texas: "By preserving the spot's historic and romantic associations, Mr. Scobee's book should attract many Texans to visit the old fort and find their sojourn enriched." [10]

While the Old Fort Davis Company pressed the publicity angle, D.A. Simmons' work crews remodeled the first three houses along Officers' Row, and offered them for rent. This encouraged a group of five Fort Davis residents to approach Simmons in May 1948 to lease acreage in Hospital Canyon for construction of the "Fort Davis Boys Camp." They spent \$10,000 to pour concrete floors upon which to install tents and a screened mess hall. They then leased the camp to a Mr. and Mrs. Tenney, managers of the nearby boys' camp at the Prude ranch, who envisioned an "exclusive prep school" at the post. This venture lasted only one summer, and by 1951 the company negotiated with Sul Ross State Teachers College and with George W. Donaldson of the Tyler school system to offer a summer institute for Texas school teachers interested in conducting their own outdoor education programs. Donaldson told the *Alpine Avalanche* prior to the start of the first (and only) Fort Davis teachers institute that his goal was to show postwar youth the "thousand and one things that go to make mentally rounded-out citizens in comprehending the country's resources." Speaking prophetically, Davidson warned that "many city children do not know where the milk they drink, nor the vegetables they eat, come from." The Texas educator admitted that "through no fault of their own they haven't the slightest notion of the meaning of conservation or the preservation of our national heritage of outdoor wealth and health and pleasure." Perhaps the beauty and history of Fort Davis could help "the generations now and to come . . . learn enough about these things to be instrumental in saving our country in its land and natural resources." [11]

Teachers institutes, no matter how appropriate, could not generate the revenue needed by D.A. Simmons to render Fort Davis a self-sustaining venture. On more than one occasion he confided to his wife, Elizabeth: "I don't know how we'll ever manage it, but I do not propose . . . to see that fabulous place further deteriorate." That sentiment led Simmons in 1949 to read in *Texas Parade Magazine* a story about the joint partnership undertaken by the state parks board, the Interior department, and the Catholic archdiocese of San Antonio to restore the Eighteenth-century "Mission San Jose" in that community. Simmons wrote to his friend, Gordon K. Shearer, executive secretary of the parks board, to explain his plans for Fort Davis and to seek advice on forging a similar agreement with the state and the NPS. He told Shearer that he had bought the post because he had learned while staying at the Indian Lodge

of "a Dallas real estate man [who] was contemplating purchasing the site . . . , clearing off all the old ruins and subdividing it for mountain cabins for people in his vicinity." Simmons had heard of the work of the Mile High Club on behalf of the fort, and also "of the non-interest of anybody in Texas officialdom with authority to do anything about it." He then remarked on the power of politics to dictate creation of Texas parks: "I like Indian Lodge and the state park, but just why anybody would establish it and leave the old Fort with all of its history to disintegrate, is somewhat beyond me." [12]

Outlining his proposal to Shearer, the Houston attorney noted how he had refurbished a total of eight buildings on site, and had improved the assessed value of Fort Davis to \$171,694.52. Simmons himself could not afford much more work at the post, and was being "approached by first one and then another to do something with the property." Among its suggested uses were "a super-duper dude ranch, excluding the general public, or that it be made into a super tourist motel in a transcontinental highway chain, etc." Clearly these options did not appeal to the former ABA president, who reminded Shearer: "I need not stress my point that it should be preserved for posterity." Simmons knew of the state park's board's "lack of funds," and that the legislature, "unless pressured by blocks of voters, is not likely to buy property for the interest of future generations." He then referred to Barry Scobee's *Old Fort Davis*, which called the post "the most active of the Indian forts in the [18]50s, 60s, and 70s." For this reason, said Simmons, "the people of this country in centuries to come will be more and more interested in this site." His records indicated that the post had "approximately" as many visitors "as are going down to the Big Bend National Park," and predicted: "Since it is the only cool summer spot in West Texas and is halfway between Carlsbad Caverns and the Big Bend Park, attendance in the future will undoubtedly grow by leaps and bounds." Simmons then closed by suggesting that in the event of his death (which would occur two years later), "I am quite sure the property would have to be sold for inheritance taxes." Given the postwar growth in travel that Simmons had outlined, he warned that someone else would be tempted to commercialize the fort; an outcome "which I would personally regret." [13]

Gordon Shearer did not offer any optimistic words to Simmons, who then hired a series of custodians to manage the property. The first couple to run Fort Davis were relatives of Mrs. Simmons, Mr. and Mrs. Walter M. Daggett of Pecos. They operated the post for one summer, and then the Simmonses contracted in 1950 with Ed Bartholomew of Houston and Leslie R. Scott of Alpine. The latter had been a radio announcer with KVLFF-AM, and agreed to live year round at the fort. The *Alpine Avalanche* reported on January 13, 1950, that Scott would oversee a cafe, trading post, and "whatever seems needful to attract visitors to the Old Fort." Mrs. A.N. Alkire, the Fort Davis correspondent for the *Avalanche*, gave special mention to the post's "curio display," which she described as "the largest collection of Indian artifacts in this section of the country." She also noted that Scott would host a series of radio broadcasts on his former station, three times weekly, that highlighted the area in a "variety show" format of "music and talks." Scott, however, did not stay long at the fort, and Simmons replaced him with Louie Wiggs and Juan Razo. Ed Bartholomew also broke the lease after one year, and the Simmons family faced hiring more custodians without the prospect of additional revenue. [14]

The latest in a series of reversals of fortune for Fort Davis occurred in March 1951, when D.A. Simmons died of a heart attack at the age of 53. His wife, who would later marry John C. Jackson, recalled in 1966 how her husband's passing "spared him much of what I saw and experienced later" in managing the post. She wrote to the then-superintendent of the historic site, Franklin Smith: "You would have enjoyed knowing him, for he was a man of great depth, keen perception and vision." Without his advice and guidance, Mrs. Simmons advertised in the spring of 1952 in a series of Texas newspapers for someone to take over management of the post. The only serious respondent was Malcolm "Bish" Tweedy, a 34-year old war veteran and graduate of Princeton University whose father had been born and

raised on a ranch west of San Antonio. Tweedy, who was living in San Angelo at the time, had married Sally Godfrey of Carlsbad, New Mexico, the year before, and their honeymoon had included an automobile trip to Big Bend and the town of Fort Davis. The young couple eventually wanted more regular working hours, and their sense of history and drama (they had met while working at the San Angelo Civic Theatre) led them to answer Mrs. Simmons' solicitation. [15]

The arrival of the Tweedys to Fort Davis began the final phase of the quest for a national park at the old post. Bish and Sally fell in love with the ruins, as they touched their sense of the romantic ((Bish recalled 43 years later that the grounds were "eerily beautiful"). They moved into one of the restored officers' quarters, took charge of the soda fountain and gift shop, and tried (unsuccessfully) to operate "The Bandana Room," a restaurant where Sally cooked and Bish served guests. Their chief source of income was the gift shop, a venture that paid for itself with the steady visitation of summer ("10 to 20 people during the week days and often up to a hundred or more on weekends"). The first winter (1952-1953), however, brought few tourists and less money to cover the \$300 monthly lease. The Tweedys did have more time to roam the grounds, unearthing dozens of artifacts, and to witness the continuing process of deterioration. One legend that the Tweedys encountered was the discovery of over 100 whisky bottles buried by the post sutler behind his store just before the Confederate forces in 1861 marched into the Fort Davis area. The sutler, whom Tweedy learned was "a stubborn old Yankee from New England," supposedly did not want the "dang rebels" to drink his whisky, and he hid the bottles so that they could not be confiscated for a Southern victory celebration. In reality, the bottles were discovered (buried end to end) on Sleeping Lion Mountain (west of the modern-day parking lot). Bish Tweedy conceded some four decades later that the NPS may never know the real story of the buried whisky bottles. [16]

This revelation led the Tweedys to close their dining room (they had served only about one dozen patrons that winter), and to convert the space into a museum. The notorious bottle collection was the "centerpiece," although visitors seemed eager to pay 25 and 50 cent admissions to view their "1858 quarter, the 10th Cavalry stencil and a lovely little brown earthenware ink bottle." The success of history as a drawing card for the Tweedys prompted them one night to discuss at a bridge game with George and Flora Merrill, longtime residents of Fort Davis, the need to preserve the site in some organized fashion. The Merrills agreed with the post caretakers that failure to solicit support from the federal and state governments rendered the next step "a community effort." Thus on February 18, 1953, the Tweedys hosted at their small museum 13 interested residents of the surrounding area who voted to become the "Davis Mountains Historical Society." They also decided to invite additional members for a second meeting on February 25, which selected as its officers George Merrill as president, R.D. McCready as vice-president, and Sally Tweedy as secretary-treasurer. Bish Tweedy agreed to become chairman of the museum committee, while Barry Scobee consented to assist him. Finally, the gathering voted to change their name to the "Fort Davis Historical Society," and to solicit funds for the "acquisition and preservation of the old Fort Davis Army Post and the preservation and marking of historical landmarks in the Davis Mountains area. "They would also attempt to "collect and display objects of historical interest in a suitable museum and to preserve in writing or in permanent form the interesting historical talks and events of this area since the days of the early settlers together with such photographs and documents as may deserve preservation." [17]

Energized with the ambition to succeed where others had failed, the Tweedys and their historical society colleagues undertook a letter-writing campaign to ascertain the merits of their proposal. A guest at the March 8 meeting, Mr. V.E. Smith, informed the group that "the national government is definitely interested in the restoration of the fort." It seemed that the NPS had inquired in February 1952 about including Fort Davis in its next round of studies, but no action had been taken. Mrs. Simmons came to the May 11 gathering in town, and

expressed her interest "in working with the society to turn [sell] the property." At this point the members called upon Sally Tweedy to inquire of state officials the status of the Texas Historical Survey Commission. Allan Shivers, governor of Texas, replied that the commission would be appointed soon, and that he would support the inclusion of Fort Davis, as "several other people have written to me about this famous frontier post." [18]

One member of the society had also written to Lemuel "Lon" Garrison , superintendent of Big Bend National Park, seeking his advice on the process of incorporation into the park service. Garrison wrote to M.R. Tillotson, Region III director, informing him that the historical society had invited him to their June 8 meeting to offer guidance on application procedures. Tillotson indicated official approval of "the revival of interest in the preservation of old Fort Davis," and considered it "highly desirable for you to attend the meeting . . . and keep in touch with further activity on this line." He did warn the Big Bend superintendent: "Fort Davis has not been approved or definitely classified by the [NPS] Advisory Board . . . and that a conservative attitude towards new proposals is to be expected in general." The regional director also warned Garrison that local interests needed to know that NPS designation as a "national historic site," with management by the state of Texas (as had been done for "San Jose Mission National Historic Site" in San Antonio) meant that "the Service would not then be actually taking it over and probably would not be in a position to contribute a great deal toward the area's development." San Jose, by comparison, had received "technical advice and some assistance but very little actual cash." [19]

Traveling to Fort Davis on June 8, Lon Garrison met with 30 residents eager to hear how their neighbors to the south had brought the Park Service to far west Texas. The Big Bend superintendent gave the society a basic overview of his park, including "a review of tourist travel economics." In the question-and-answer session that followed, the most prominent query was "that the National Park Service might take over the area for restoration after purchase and administration as a National Monument." As politely as he could, Garrison outlined the paper trail from the NPS regional office to the service's s advisory board. He also "added that as a practical matter the problem of securing funds for the extensive work necessary just seemed almost impossible." In his report to Tillotson, the NPS official said that "the group [historical society] does not seem to be well unified, which is regrettable, for old Fort Davis is a charming place and deserves better treatment than it is receiving now." Garrison remarked on the efforts of D.A. Simmons to restore the property; a rendering that he considered "far from accurate." "Most of the buildings are about gone," the superintendent reported, "and another year will just about complete the ruin." Further complicating matters was Bish Tweedy's statement to Garrison that "Mrs. Simmons is now asking \$200,000 for the 480 acres which is quite unrealistic in [the superintendent's] opinion." [20]



Figure 8. Hospital Steward's Quarters in ruins (1950s).
Courtesy Fort Davis NHS.

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Chapter Four:

Shaping a Visible Past: The Five-Year Plan of Historic Preservation, 1961-1966

The signing in September 1961 of legislation creating Fort Davis National Historic Site constituted the first half of the journey for revitalization of the abandoned military post. Before Lady Bird Johnson could grace the platform at the dedication ceremonies in 1966, NPS officials and supporters labored for five years to develop strategies for restoration of buildings, hire staff, implement policies and guidelines, and convince the surrounding community of the importance of park service programs to their lives. For Fort Davis, the historic site had not only the backing of many political sponsors, but also the good timing that Michael Kammen found critical to park survival in the 1960s. "Between 1961 and 1979," said the historian of American cultural memory, "the federal government became principal sponsor and custodian of national traditions." Yet within these two decades, "[there] began a process of fiscal and administrative retrenchment that has continued ever since." [1]

Such considerations were on the minds of park service personnel throughout the five years dedicated to the planning and implementation of the \$1 million restoration and stabilization program at Fort Davis. They and their local partners in west Texas knew only too well of concerns about the coercive power of the federal government, not to mention its taxes and regulatory demands. The NPS also had to contend with national forces in the first half of the tumultuous decade of the 1960s: race, ethnicity, antiwar sentiment, and growing disaffection with the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, whose support of Fort Davis had made its high level of funding possible. Yet the chance to work on a park that Franklin Smith, superintendent from 1965-1971, called the "last of the old parks," because of its "touch of the romantic," proved spellbinding for NPS officials eager to work on the story of the frontier West and its Indian wars. [2]

Even before the arrival in Fort Davis late in 1962 of the first superintendent, Michael Becker, the Park Service and its parent, the Interior department, learned of the expectations and controversy that the historic site would generate throughout the first thirty five years of its existence. A "Miss Virginia M. Stallings" wrote to the Senate sponsor of the park legislation, Ralph Yarborough, in November 1961 to complain about a rumor that she had heard about waste in the Park Service. Miss Stallings asked the whether NPS planned to "entertain proposals to demolish any of the historic structures comprising Fort Davis." This was in addition to a story that Interior sought to "expend \$3,000,000 for a grass growing project in the desert [she did not say where]." John A. Carver, assistant secretary of the Interior, thus had to release the first of many letters of correction to critics of the NPS. Carver informed Senator Yarborough that not only did the Park Service not intend to destroy the buildings at Fort Davis (nor grow grass in the desert), but that "it has been our experience frequently that after the Congress has authorized the establishment of a new unit of the National Park System rumors of various sorts, often unfounded, are circulated." [3]

More thorough was the inquiry of Dale Walton, state editor for the *San Angelo Standard-Times*, who asked SWR's Erik Reed in March 1962 to provide information about the status of

the park. Walton apologized for not knowing more about the plans of the Park Service, and reminded Reed that "we have a prime interest in the fort and the town and would like to get started with stories on work there." Reed sent Walton a copy of Bob Utley's 1960 "area investigation report," and noted that until the NPS purchased the land from Mrs. Jackson, "I cannot give you a precise forecast of future activities at Fort Davis." The regional chief of interpretation did, however, reveal that the park service had asked Congress to include in its fiscal year 1963 budget \$395,026, which "would provide for the purchase of the property and for staffing the area with essential personnel." In addition, the SWR could then "launch the first year's work on stabilization and restoration of the historic structures, and begin the construction of roads and trails, visitor center (museum and park headquarters building), employee residences, and utility structures." Construction would be designed and managed by the NPS, but private firms would receive the contracts for the actual work. Reed did not anticipate charging admission fees (one of Walton's queries), as it was not NPS policy to do so "at areas of the size and character of Fort Davis." The regional office, however, "would appreciate receiving copies of any articles [Walton] may write on Fort Davis," and Reed looked forward to working with the San Angelo paper in the promotion of the newest park in west Texas. [4]

Curiosity and confusion about Fort Davis reached the highest levels of the park service that same week in March 1962 when Frank Masland, a member of the Interior Secretary's Advisory Board from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, wrote to his friend "Connie" (Conrad) Wirth, NPS director, about his recent trip to the Davis Mountains. Echoing a sentiment of many easterners, Masland found the area "beautiful," and thought that "they would probably qualify as a National Park." But in his "humble opinion, Old Fort Davis doesn't qualify for anything." As a staunch conservationist, Masland considered the stone and adobe structures to be "a mongrel bunch," and "it would appear that some of them are being lived in." He then criticized the elaborate plans made for Fort Davis: "The lay of the land is such that if with a considerable expenditure of money buildings could be restored and/or stabilized and the place cleaned up, there would, I think, be little visitation and less reason for it." Wirth's friend then suggested that "it would not be simple to lay out a program for visitors," since "the buildings are scattered over too wide an area." Instead Masland hoped "that if there is public pressure for Service acquisition it can be resisted." [5]

The bluntness of Masland's letter required a diplomatic response from the NPS director, who thanked him for his "views" and could "appreciate that in [Fort Davis'] present condition it may not have impressed you favorably." Wirth expected that passage of the 1963 park service appropriation bill "will provide funds for land acquisition there and some money to begin a program of stabilization of the structures and ruins." The director then hoped that Masland would "change your mind about Fort Davis when you see it again . . . after we have had a chance to improve conditions there." Wirth saw in Fort Davis "a long and fascinating history in the story of the southwestern frontier." The park service stood committed to "bring this out in our development," and he took pride in the fact that "the people in Texas are enthusiastic over the prospects." [6]

The long-awaited congressional funding arrived in October 1962, which permitted the NPS to approach Mrs. Jackson with an offer to purchase her property. When Barry Scobee received word of this action, he wrote to Conrad Wirth in December 1962 asking advice about the promise made by the Fort Davis Historical Society (FDHS) to contribute whatever funds it had towards the acquisition of park land. The amount stood at some \$5,000, and Scobee wondered if this could be applied to another project since Congress would now meet Mrs. Jackson's quote. What the venerable historian of the Davis Mountains sought was use of the money to publish his manuscript on Fort Davis and the surrounding territory. Wirth considered it "an advantage to have a book on Fort Davis, such as yours, available for the public as soon as possible after the historic site is established." The park service would be

several years away from producing its own text on Fort Davis. To that end, Wirth instructed SWR's Bob Utley "to assist [Scobee] in any way possible if you have any questions concerning format or historical procedures in publications." [7]

Appropriation of Fort Davis monies in late 1962 also permitted the park service to advance the work of Bob Utley along two tracks: the development of the historic structures report (so that construction could begin the following spring); and the collection of historic data for use in the new museum and visitors center complex (itself the target of early construction work). Michael Becker remembered how Utley's professionalism influenced the quality of the work. Utley, in Becker's words, was "very thorough," and provided the superintendent much "useful information." Becker had come to the park from his first superintendency at Tumacacori National Monument in Arizona. He had never heard of Fort Davis, but realized soon thereafter that a combination of regional and Texas political interest in the site made it a special place. Becker would later call Fort Davis his "best job in 30 years in the park service," in part because of its high profile and because of the chance to build a park from the ground up. In addition, the lack of new park formation in the 1950s had meant few career moves for park rangers. By 1960, said Becker, 80 percent of rangers had "hit their peak." Fort Davis allowed him to move upward from Tumacacori, and he knew at the time that "few superintendents get that experience [where] everything jelled." [8]



Figure 17. Superintendent Michael Becker and Barry Scobee reviewing Master Plan (1963).
Courtesy Fort Davis NHS.

One reason that "everything jelled" at Fort Davis was the unification of historical research by Bob Utley, both for the historic structures and the visitors center/museum complex. In the summer of 1962, Utley combed the files of the National Archives in Washington to prepare

both documentary and photographic evidence of the existence of the old military post. Thomas J. Allen, Utley's boss at SWR, informed the chief architect of the park service's Western Office of Design and Construction (WODC) that Utley had run into delays because of the distinctive nature of Fort Davis research. "The guidelines for preparing historic structures reports were designed for the problem of a single building," said Allen in September 1962. Fort Davis compounded this situation because "we have more than fifty historic buildings or sites of buildings, about half of which are represented by standing structures or remnants of structures." Utley had also discovered that "the documentary material on Fort Davis located in the National Archives has significant gaps that complicate the task of preparing the historic structures report." For these reasons, Allen suggested that Utley travel to San Francisco to discuss the Fort Davis plan with Charley Pope the historical architect of WODC, and then to write his draft based upon the linkage of the concerns of the NPS' architectural and historical offices. [9]

Upon Utley's return to Santa Fe from consultations with San Francisco NPS officials, he realized that Fort Davis' lack of staff and management would hinder standard park service strategies for supervision of construction work (especially given the project's isolation from other NPS sites, and the high volume of work to be undertaken). In addition, Utley had not completed all his own historical research for the museum. James M. Carpenter, acting SWR director, told WODC officials in November 1962 that work needed to begin as soon as practicable on the overhanging porches to protect the facilities on officers' row, but that private contractors could not be left alone on site to complete the task, for fear that "it would not be given the consideration that the historic structures deserve." Sanford Hill, chief of WODC, added to the sense of urgency by noting that "our plan for the Southwest Region this year consists entirely of the work at Fort Davis." He wanted to transfer to Fort Davis on or about January 1, 1963, a staff architect to oversee plans for "immediate support and shoring of walls, roofs and grounds to preclude further deterioration." Such a person could then prepare additional historic structures reports for later phases of stabilization, "supervise any necessary Day Labor and Contract work," and draw blueprints for "reconstruction of the Barracks Building No. [20] which probably will be restored as a Visitor's Center and Administration Building." The fact that Fort Davis had \$40,000 available for construction work appealed to Allen and Hill, and the two discussed how to move the project forward without having to send everything to the central office in Washington. [10]

The arrival of Utley's reports in regional and WODC offices allowed its supervisors to comment upon the unconventional strategies suggested for such a park as Fort Davis. A. Clark Stratton, assistant director for design and construction in Washington, praised Charley Pope's original concept of overhanging porch roofs. "The proposal to protect the buildings surrounding the parade ground by means of limited restoration consisting of new roof structures and porches which will return the buildings to their original image," Stratton told the SWR director, "is considered here to be a desirable and welcome departure from past practices." Robert Utley remembered Pope's design as "revolutionary and brilliant," especially in light of Region III's focus on archeology over history. Stratton also declared Utley's report an "excellent . . . framework for consideration of the treatment of Fort Davis as a whole." Stratton's only reservation was the call for rehabilitation of the post hospital, which he saw as "not as defensible as are the other proposed restorations." Roy Appleman, Washington office (WASO) staff historian, concurred in Stratton's judgments, calling the hospital "a major financial undertaking, together with its subsequent furnishing and maintenance." Appleman favored "retaining the hospital as a ruin, giving it treatment similar to other buildings of this character in the Fort area." The WASO historian then went beyond Stratton's comments to suggest that the visitors center (which he agreed should be housed in the barracks building) be modeled upon Homestead National Monument, in Beatrice, Nebraska. Homestead had "large wall historical murals which reflect the theme for the place." A staff historian could be dispatched to Homestead, said Appleman, to devise a

similar depiction for the visitors center at Fort Davis. [[11](#)]

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Chapter Five:

Encounters with the Ghosts of Old Fort Davis: Interpretation and Resource Management, 1966-1980

As Superintendent Frank Smith and his staff folded the chairs and took down the bunting from the highly successful dedication ceremonies of Fort Davis, they could take pride in the swift work of restoration at the "best preserved frontier military post" in the National Park Service. The record throng gathered on the old parade ground had been given a glimpse not only of the wonders of the past restored, but also of what the park service could accomplish when the nation's leaders provided it with sufficient resources and guidance. The next 15 years, by comparison, would witness in the Davis Mountains the challenge that the NPS faced in bringing its standards and strategies to bear upon a facility that would not attract such notoriety again, nor would it be graced with the presence of such dignitaries as the First Lady, Secretary of the Interior, and the governor of the state of Texas. Finally, the decline of fiscal support in the late 1960s and early 1970s would make Fort Davis yearn for the heady days of generous budgets, and would influence matters of administration, resource management, historic structure interpretation, and visitor services.

Where the NPS and Fort Davis promoters benefitted from the nascent liberalization of American politics in the first half of the 1960s, forces at home and abroad in the latter half of the decade shifted the nation toward more conservative and combative postures in matters of public service and financing of national parks. The escalation of the conflict in Vietnam required more monies to be diverted from domestic concerns, even as the rising casualties in Southeast Asia made many citizens suspicious of the federal government's role in public affairs. Added to this was the downturn in race relations, despite federal regulations requiring more access to employment of women and minorities. Riots in major American cities over issues of fairness and equity did not touch far west Texas, but the heritage of Fort Davis (a black post in a white ranching community with awkward relations between Anglos and Hispanics) brought home the question of balance and accuracy that would shape interpretive programs at the historic site once the "easy" work of building restoration concluded.

Fort Davis would be led by two superintendents of differing character and training in the years 1966-1980: Frank Smith, who would remain after the dedication for another five years, and Derek O. Hambly, who managed the facility from 1971-1978. The former was interested in the evocative power of the park, and worked most on its museum and retreat parade (especially its music). The latter, a naturalist and biologist by training, would be remembered by staff for his desire to delegate to his employees the course of park interpretation, and for his efforts to round out the park's boundaries and find its identity as an historic site. In neither case, however, did the Park Service place an historian in charge to guide the unit as it searched for the right combination of data and interpretation that would satisfy the varied constituency of Fort Davis: the national perspective of the NPS, the local concerns of the community, and the growing awareness by scholars of the role of race and ethnicity in public affairs and private life.

The historian Michael Kammen spoke to the problems that Fort Davis and its parent agency

would have in moving through the thicket of public opinion and scholarly debate as a repository of the nation's frontier past. "The differences . . . between the roles of tradition and memory," said Kammen, "have less to do with what is remembered, or how traditions are transmitted, and more to do with the politics of culture, with the American quest for consensus and stability, and with the broad acceptance of the notion that government's role as a custodian of memory ought to be comparatively modest." That had not been the case in the first five years of Fort Davis' existence as a national park, but would loom large as superintendents Smith and Hambly juggled NPS directives, regional sentiments, and congressional constraints on development of a park that had enchanted so many park service professionals in its formative stages. [1]

Superintendent Smith became aware of the new realities descending upon his park within days of the departure of Lady Bird Johnson and her entourage. By May 1966, Smith had been informed of the reduction of staff at Fort Davis, just as the visitor season had begun. He informed the SWR director that his park could anticipate visitation in excess of 250,000 in the next two years, given the potential for auto travel to Texas and Mexico for the 1967 San Antonio Hemisfair and the 1968 Summer Olympic Games in Mexico City. Smith also had too many facilities to supervise for the staff allocated in 1966; a year when President Lyndon Johnson reduced non-military expenditures to subsidize over 500,000 uniformed personnel stationed in Southeast Asia. Matters only worsened as Smith developed his budgets for fiscal year 1969, realizing that he could not meet the plans of the early 1960s with the funds at hand (he had hoped to have trails ready and work done on the original fort [1854-1861]). [2]

Concern about visitation would accelerate throughout 1967 and beyond for Smith, as each month saw increases (despite the bulge created in the records by the dedication ceremonies). Fort Davis did not charge admission in these years, nor did it have an accurate method of assessing visitor totals. Smith used a multiplier of automobiles counted in the parking lot, the average of 3.5 to 3.7 persons per car, and the number of hours estimated that each visitor spent on site. Easter Sunday 1967 set a record of 2,676 visitors, with 4,793 people coming to the park on the four-day Easter weekend. Variables like hot weather would cause declines in a particular month, but the superintendent reported to his superiors in Santa Fe that interest and attention in his park continued to grow as more individuals became aware of its existence, or stopped en route to other NPS attractions at Big Bend or Carlsbad Caverns national parks. [3]



Figure 39. Richard Razo (on right) and other Cooperative Education Students performing curatorial work (early 1970s).
Courtesy Fort Davis NHS.



Figure 40. Superintendent Frank Smith giving Superior Performance Award to Pablo Bencomo (July 1968).
Courtesy Fort Davis NHS.

The issue of hiring at Fort Davis occupied the thoughts of Frank Smith a good deal in the spring and summer of 1966, as he looked back upon the changes that were sweeping the park service that decade. In July he offered "one man's opinions" to the NPS "Field Operations Study Team" that solicited comments from the field in response to director George Hartzog's plans to reorient the park service with new definitions of employment. Smith, a veteran of 16 years of service with the NPS, noted that his agency "is operating under the tightest economic squeeze we have ever known, in relation to workload." Factors of economic growth, population increases tied to the maturing of the postwar "baby boom," and the expansion of leisure time only exacerbated the "continuing pressure between ceilings of all types and diminishing manpower relative to new programs and new facilities," which Smith predicted "is not going to ease--rather, we may expect it to get tougher." Unlike the Great Depression, Smith did not see new funds on the horizon to meet the needs of the new parks created in the frenzy of the early 1960s. Instead, he called upon the NPS to include small parks like Fort Davis in their calculations of workload and job description, disliking the natural tendency within the agency to link all pay grades and promotions to the duties assumed at the largest NPS units. Smith also asked for a reduction in the amount of report-writing and paperwork assigned to the field; a situation he considered onerous for Fort Davis, where staff were spread thin without the support of larger parks like Grand Canyon or Yellowstone. [4]

What allowed Smith and the staff at Fort Davis to overcome the lack of NPS funding for personnel was the hiring of minority and youth employees through several of the 1960s' "Great Society" work initiatives. The primary program was the Neighborhood Youth Corps (NYC), which came to the Davis Mountains-Big Bend area in the fall of 1966. Superintendent Smith wrote that September to Walter Parr, the Alpine-based director of the Big Bend Community Action Agency, encouraging him to send prospective NYC workers to Fort Davis. He considered employment at his park to be more than "routine labor." Instead

the youth could engage in "the glorification of our national heritage;" a reference to the types of work needed at the park. Smith conceded that "simple maintenance" like "the brushing out of trails" would be required. Yet he could also offer them "more academic pursuits such as the cataloguing of museum specimens;" a task long delayed because of understaffing. [5]

Helping Smith in the task of selecting and training these youth was Pablo Bencomo, whom the superintendent praised for seeking out the "brightest and best" among community members to work at Fort Davis. Years later, Smith remembered that the NYC employees performed valuable services of maintenance and preservation, while also helping address "an obvious imbalance in the NPS" because the vast majority of Fort Davis NYC staff were Hispanic. The training process at the park differed from that offered to conventional NPS hires, however, with much emphasis on basic job skills. One example of the type of supervision required of NYC employees was the "counseling" mandated by the federal government. In training the youth to work with artifacts, Smith, Bencomo, and other full-time employees led them in discussions about "the growing need for education in the modern world, and the loss to society and the individual through leaving school." Chief NPS curator Harold Peterson came to Fort Davis from Washington in November 1966 to conduct workshops for the NYC staff on artifact preservation, and for the Fort Davis employees on how to handle the youth. Smith also recognized the role of race in the NYC program, telling his superiors in Santa Fe that the use of minority supervisors gave the Hispanic staff "a clear indication that there is no minority line drawn at Fort Davis nor in the Service." The superintendent recommended that NPS send minority park service employees to visit the NYC program to remind the youth "that they are not second-class citizens in the eyes of the Service, and that the Service does not recognize differences in this regard." [6]

The impact of ethnicity on Fort Davis reached beyond federally sponsored youth employment to the park service's own personnel actions. The "imbalance" to which Superintendent Smith referred had its counterpart in the ranks of seasonal and full-time park employees, even though Fort Davis had a long history of multiculturalism as well as racial tension. To that end, Smith worked throughout his tenure as superintendent to attract blacks and Indians to the park staff: the former because of the link between the buffalo soldiers and the interpretation he wished for the park; the latter because of the need to tell the story of the Native societies who had inhabited the Davis Mountains and Trans-Pecos region, forcing the United States to erect the frontier military post in the first place. Smith recalled in 1994 how difficult it had been to bring black seasonal employees to Fort Davis in the 1960s. He traveled to Dallas and Austin to speak with guidance counselors and placement officers of historically black colleges about sending young men and women to west Texas to work for him. Other parks were conducting similar recruiting ventures, as were private corporations and public agencies eager to include minorities in their workforce. The isolation of Fort Davis thus hurt Smith's chances with urban blacks, while others disliked what they saw as "tokenism:" the employment of a handful of minorities to assuage what they considered to be "liberal guilt." A final obstacle for Smith in bringing black people into the park service was the reputation that the city of Odessa received in national news media as "the most discriminatory town in the US." Even though Odessa was 160 miles away from Fort Davis, eastern and southern blacks who knew little of the geography of west Texas believed that conditions in the oil boom town were typical of the entire region. [7]

In the spring of 1967, Superintendent Smith thought that he had attracted a local college student, Ray Nelson, to come to work that summer from nearby Sul Ross College. Nelson, who played football for the Alpine school, received instead an offer from the Dallas Cowboys professional football team to join their preseason training camp, and thus Smith lost his best chance at a black seasonal who could represent the story of the soldiers who had inhabited the post after the Civil War. Smith, however, had more success recruiting an Indian employee, Frank Chappabitty, a Comanche from Lawton, Oklahoma, who attended the

University of Oklahoma in Norman. Smith had also employed Fred Peso, a senior at New Mexico State University who was a member of the Mescalero Apache tribe; the people most closely linked to the history of the Trans-Pecos. The need for Indian voices in the interpretation of the Fort Davis story eventually prompted Mary Williams and Nicholas "Nick" Bleser, both historians and rangers, to apply in 1970 for the NPS' "Indian Youth Program." This would have employed four Indian youth for 30 days to acquaint them with careers in the park service, as well as to "enlighten and educate visitors with regard to modern (and possibly historic) Indians in the course of routine conversation." [8]

Despite the commitment of the NPS to hiring additional staff for the purposes of affirmative action, and Smith's desire to represent the Fort Davis story more accurately, continued reductions in operating budgets for the park service took their toll on the management of the park. In October 1968, as the Vietnam war reached traumatic levels, and the highly contentious presidential campaign moved towards closure, the park service informed Smith and his peers that there would be no new staffing for the following tourist season. Smith suggested that in order to save money for summer seasonal hires, he would close the park for two days per week that winter. This would allow the staff to handle the crush of report-writing that had accumulated during the previous summer, and also to provide visitors during the slow season with better service. In addition, Smith learned that his chief ranger, Bob Crisman, sought a transfer to a park closer to family in Carlsbad; a situation that resulted in October 1970 with Crisman leaving Fort Davis after five years of valued service. [9]

Superintendent Smith noted before his departure in 1971 how important it was to continue searching for quality ethnic hires. On March 1 of that year, he wrote a confidential memorandum to the SWR director about his impending transfer to the Chamizal National Memorial in El Paso. His departure from Fort Davis provided the NPS with "one of the best possible opportunities for the assignment of a black American as superintendent in a small area." Smith considered his staff "already ethnically diverse," and operating at "a level of excellence which you will seldom find." For these reasons the "assignment of an employee who has not yet served as superintendent will create fewer problems for the employee concerned than in any other area I know." In addition, Fort Davis resided in an area that was "representative of a portion of black history which has not been given adequate exposure." Smith did warn the Santa Fe office that it would have to appoint a black career NPS employee so that "the community, before it can drop its own bafflers, must be made to realize that the old stereotypes have always been in error." The departing superintendent thought that "the community does not yet realize that it is indeed ready for a move in this direction," and by appointing someone whom the locals could trust "to a job which involves the fourth largest payroll in the county and which has a wide influence in many ways will prevent the development of an adverse reaction among the majority of the people." Smith then recommended to the regional director two individuals as his replacement: John A. Carrington, a community relations specialist at the Washington NPS office; and John Troy Lissimore, the historian at Ford's Theatre in Washington. "The bigots will exist," he concluded, but selections like these could help the park service, in Smith's words, "take immediate and affirmative action" to provide Fort Davis with leadership more reflective of its historic traditions. [10]

Frank Smith's awareness of the complexity of race relations in the Trans-Pecos region reflected also his sensitivity to the political nature of his park, and of the watchful eyes that local and state officials cast his way. Employment that constituted the "fourth-largest payroll" in Jeff Davis County, especially when so many minority youth were brought to the park, would not escape the attention of Anglo locals. Thus on more than one occasion, Smith had to respond to inquiries from politicians acting on behalf of constituents seeking employment at Fort Davis. The most difficult of these to address came from veterans of military service, who faced challenges finding work in the area without specialized training. U.S.

Representative Richard White of El Paso, the successor to J.T. Rutherford, was approached in October 1967 by three veterans who claimed to have been rejected for positions at Fort Davis as "common labor." They claimed that those hired at the park were not veterans, nor did they have better training than themselves. "We have lived here always," said the unsigned letter from the three veterans to White, "excepting War Service." They were all "property owners and therefore Tax Payers." They believed that they were "not getting a small part of a square deal," and asked the El Paso Democrat: "Is it possible one might have to pay homage to obtain employment at this National Historic Site?" [\[11\]](#)

White's query forced Smith to outline in detail the procedures used by the NPS to employ maintenance personnel at Fort Davis, and to calculate the military service of existing employees. The Civil Service Commission had created the process of an "Applicant Supply File," from which Smith would draw names for employment. The superintendent had advertised the file in the nearby towns of Marfa and Alpine, as well as in Fort Davis, from which he "obtained a list which includes roughly twice the number of laborers we would normally hire." The civil service rules also permitted Smith to hire "employees of several seasons of superlative work," regardless of their veterans' status. "There also may be some concern locally," the superintendent told White, "about the hiring of five youngsters in the President's Back-to-School program. ' Community members thought that they were regular park service hires, not knowing of the various categories of federal employment. As for the complaint that Smith did not hire former soldiers: "Our current temporary labor crew includes three ten point veterans, seven veterans, and three non-veterans, which I think will demonstrate our good faith in this matter." "Let me assure you," Smith told White, "and your constituents, that there is no discrimination of any nature in our hiring at Fort Davis, nor will there be during my tenure as Superintendent." [\[12\]](#)

Not all of Frank Smith's interactions with Texas political figures were as difficult as employment issues. More amusing was the exchange between Representative White, Smith, and Barry Scobee about the decision by Smith to disregard Scobee's cherished tale of Indian Emily. Scobee had waited until after the April 1966 dedication ceremonies to resurrect his grievance with Smith's closure of the access road to Indian Emily's "grave." The "father of Fort Davis" first approached Texas state senator Dorsey Hardeman about the treatment that Indian Emily had received at the hands of Smith. Hardeman had also been contacted on the matter by Edward Clark, U.S. Ambassador to Australia and a west Texas history buff. Hardeman argued to Senator Ralph Yarborough that "the story of Indian Emily is so firmly established as a part of the heritage of this State, and particularly of the Davis Mountains area, that to preclude convenient public access to her grave would be to destroy a beautiful legend of our heritage." The state senator from San Angelo believed that "so little harm can come from maintaining this romantic legend that I seek your [Yarborough's] help in trying to persuade the Park Service to reopen and maintain the road up to this grave." [\[13\]](#)

By 1966, the NPS animus against Indian Emily had become part of local discontent with park service rules and regulations. Hardeman thus went beyond a request for help to suggest to Yarborough that deeper problems affected management of the site. "One of our big troubles," he told the U.S. senator, "in restoring such things as old Fort Davis is that, following such restoration, the rules and regulations prescribed by bureaucrats completely thwarts the original purpose of those who worked so hard, as did you and Slick [J.T.] Rutherford, to bring about its restoration for the benefit and enjoyment by the public." Hardeman, "like Judge Scobee," had "no quarrel with the personnel at the historic site." Yet he "sometimes doubted the wisdom of some of their acts in that they sacrifice too much for over-efficiency." He then recounted to the western history aficionado that Ambassador Clark had sent him his "research" on Indian Emily, in which he proved that "she was shot by a sentry from Shelby County in the back with a Long Tom Rifle." "In all fairness," Hardeman conceded, "I may add that some doubt has been expressed as to the authenticity of this story," but he chose not

to "pursue the matter further because of my great confidence in the knowledge of Texas history possessed by our friend, the Ambassador." [14]

Yarborough's response to Hardeman's plea indicated the challenge before Frank Smith and his staff to balance local tradition with park service professionalism. "Prior to receipt of your letter the end of last week," Yarborough told the San Angelo politician, "I did not know that [Indian Emily's] grave and the tradition were being treated as they are by the Park Service." He agreed to "begin work immediately to try to have this slight to one of the state's heroines, one of the great traditions of the West, one of the legends of Fort Davis, corrected." The U.S. senator was chagrined because "this legend was bigger than Fort Davis before the Park Service cut away the grave and thereby tends to bury the legend." As to the charge that "the legend cannot be proved," Yarborough replied: "I see so much history miswritten, that I am ready to believe legend as so-called history." He argued to Hardeman that "history is what the writers make it, and in the realm of national effort or individual political effort, the winners usually write the history, or they write the version that is accepted in the textbooks." He went on to claim that Indian Emily was "a legend of noble sacrifice that saved the Fort," that "there was such a person as Indian Emily," and that "since the whites who were driving out the Apaches wrote the legend, I doubt that they wrote it favorably to the defeated and driven out race." [15]

Superintendent Smith recognized the depth of feeling held by west Texans toward Indian Emily, describing Scobee as Fort Davis' "severest friend and best critic." Smith told the SWR director that the former Justice of the Peace "has now begun to accuse us, evidently, of trying to suppress his favorite fairy tale." Scobee's persistence should not be discounted, said Smith, as "once before, Mr. Scobee was very much in a minority, but his efforts were to a large degree responsible for the creation of the Historic Site." Yet the superintendent believed that "it would be quite easy to spike Mr. Scobee's guns in this matter of access, by providing better information and access than we do at present, and making a considerable splash while so doing." The Fort Davis staff was preparing an "Interpretive Prospectus" that included "telling the Indian Emily legend, and presenting the facts which point towards the impossibility of the affair." This strategy would allow the staff to show that "the Service is not trying to ignore or restrict the spread of the legend." He considered the whole incident "a tempest in a teapot, in terms of the overall picture here or elsewhere." Yet "if some evidence of the Service's intentions can be presented," believed the superintendent, "it will save everyone, at all levels, a great deal of unnecessary correspondence--probably enough to pay for a good share of the exhibit!" [16]

It remained for Smith to assuage the doubts of the powerful Senator Yarborough with language more diplomatic than that shared between Park Service officials tired of the Indian Emily story. To Yarborough Smith acknowledged: "We are fully aware of the place in local affections held by the Indian Emily tradition, and we regret that it is no longer as convenient as in the past for visitors to reach the grave marker." He reminded the senator that "no valid historical evidence had been found to verify the legend," but rejected the claim that "closure of the access road" was "an attempt to discourage visitors from viewing the reputed gravesite." Instead the park merely implemented NPS procedure destined to "eliminate automobiles, roads, and parking areas that in our judgment would seriously mar the historic appearance and character that the restoration program is intended to create." In 1965, Smith and his staff counted no fewer than 35,000 automobiles circling the parade grounds, creating environmental, historical, and safety hazards. The superintendent suggested that the "standard walking tour of Fort Davis, three-fourths of a mile, is not longer than that in many of our historical and scenic parks," and visitors had expressed little concern about the distance as "an unwarranted imposition." If anyone asked to see the gravesite, and could not walk under their own power, Smith had arranged for a park service vehicle to transport them the additional 500 yards beyond the standard tour route. "We realize that this is not a wholly

satisfactory substitute for unrestricted vehicular access," Smith concluded, but he hoped that it was "warranted by the important benefits to be derived from excluding automobiles from the historic zone." [17]

Superintendent Smith's concern about the impact of the Indian Emily story on his park was not merely governmental pettiness, despite the claims of local and national politicians. He was determined to tell the Fort Davis tale as accurately as possible because of his long connection to the museum profession; a link that he cultivated assiduously during his six-year tenure at the historic site. Charlie Steen of the Southwest Region had encouraged Smith in the 1950s to join local and national associations that focused upon museum interpretation and visitor services, as a way to advance the professionalism of the park service and keep the organization attuned to changes in the museum business. Smith thus joined the Mountains-Plains Museum Association, serving on its board of directors from 1966-1970, at which time he became association president for one year. He also edited the Texas museum newsletter, and sat for eight years on the prestigious American Association of Museum's council. This explained his work with Bob Utley to represent Fort Davis carefully in its visitors center. It also permitted Smith to advance the cause of racial understanding through the museum at Fort Davis. In a 1971 letter to Milton Perry, museum curator for the National Archives and Records Service at the Harry S Truman Library in Independence, Missouri, the Fort Davis superintendent spoke of the importance of NPS sites addressing cultural issues. "Our experience at Fort Davis," said Smith, "has clearly shown that even a modest assemblage of material on a single aspect of a minority's experience in the United States of the last century can be of significant assistance to scholars, with the limitations on collections more than balanced by the concentration in a single field." Smith also started the process of NPS consultation with the proposed frontier military museum in San Angelo, known as "Fort Concho." "Within a few years," the superintendent told Mrs. R. G. Ross of San Marino, California, in 1968, "it may rival Fort Davis as one of the best of the western Military posts--thereby providing the sort of competition which will keep us all active and working towards the best possible visitor services!" [18]

Advising other museums in the Trans-Pecos area was not the most dramatic of Frank Smith's outreach efforts on behalf of the park service. In 1966 the NPS asked him to serve as "keyman" for the planned Chamizal National Memorial in southeast El Paso. President Lyndon Johnson, whose patronage had meant so much to the creation of Fort Davis, had also sought to advance the cause of international cooperation between the United States and Mexico. In 1963 he had urged the NPS to develop plans for a park that, rather than glorifying the conquest of the Southwest by the U.S. Army in 1846, would demonstrate how on a daily basis two cultures shared a common boundary, environment, and economy. Within three years the Fort Davis superintendent, as the NPS official closest to the proposed site on the Rio Grande, began attending meetings in El Paso designed to link the efforts of the federal governments of the two countries, along with the city of El Paso and its school district, to realize Johnson's dream of cultural harmony. [19]

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FORT DAVIS

Administrative History



Chapter Six:

Fort Davis and The Living History Initiative, 1966-1980

As with environmental and museum programs, Fort Davis' living history venture began with the tenure of Frank Smith, whose role in museum development and the music of the retreat parade fit well with the later impetus for full-dress reenactments. The 1966 dedication ceremonies had included the appearance of James Cage, an El Paso schoolteacher dressed in military uniform and talking with visitors to explain his outfit. In October 1967, Smith suggested to the Southwest Region that policies had to change about engaging the visitor more closely than before. "With modern attitudes," said the superintendent, "of maintaining a distance between them [the visitor] and the cashier who is the first uniformed employee they meet, we have to go to special lengths to get away from the barriers which so many travelers erect around themselves." Smith discovered that the large crowds that descended upon Fort Davis in the summertime made personal contact by rangers difficult if not impossible. His solution was "period dress," which he found to be "an automatic ice-breaker." "Apart from the air of authenticity which the period dress brings to the area," the superintendent noted, "this opening for contact is alone worth the extra expenditures and the effort in acquiring the appropriate items." [1]

Another foray into recreation of the historic past that Fort Davis addressed was the printing of a book of recipes by the wife of Colonel Grierson. The idea took shape when Mary Williams sought help from other NPS staffers throughout the system to test the ingredients for both their authenticity and edibility. The Fort Davis Historical Society had tried in the late 1960s to publish a book of western recipes, but was not able to organize the project in good time. Williams, who was among the NPS' first women rangers and first to promote the role of women in Park Service interpretation, approached SPMA in 1972 to determine the feasibility of a 72-page publication with both historic recipes and their contemporary renderings. "We really are sure the book will sell," Williams told SPMA's Earl Jackson, as "we have already had numerous inquiries from people and dealers concerning the book and when it will be available for purchase." The book would later appear in print, marking a significant contribution of Fort Davis to the story of family and community life on the far western frontier. [2]

These endeavors could not satisfy Frank Smith in the spring of 1971, as he sought an ambitious living history agenda at Fort Davis not unlike that undertaken a decade earlier to restore the structural identity of the frontier Army post. Times had changed, however, in Washington, with budget cutting the central feature of the administration of President Richard M. Nixon. "The living history program at Fort Davis," Smith told the regional director, "is stalled at this time, and further development must simply wait for the provision of physical facilities, as per our last five-year program." Smith and his staff promised "to continue the use of period uniforms for summer patrol and contact work . . . hoping that on some future date we will be able to acquire the horse which will enlarge upon this facet of the military life." In addition, Fort Davis awaited the "embarrassingly slow effort for the refurbishing of the Commanding Officer's Quarters (where living history will be quite elaborate)." Smith could report that his park would contribute to the NPS' "American Folk

Culture" venue that summer by joining with the Fort Davis Historical Society to celebrate Independence Day at the park. "The utilization of the full range of games and contests," said the superintendent, "with selected foods to be available, and the general atmosphere of the nineteenth century celebrations should combine to present visitors and participants with a bit of interesting nostalgia." The staff, however, were "unanimous in their opinion that period refurbishing is a prerequisite of successful operations in this part of the country." [3]

To Smith's surprise, "the First Annual Grand and Glorious Fourth of July Celebration proved to be an outstanding success. " Nick Bleser, Fort Davis ranger-historian, reported to the superintendent that the event "began as an outgrowth of a make-shift celebration held a year ago in the town of Fort Davis, where a barbecue was held and many of the townspeople participated in old-fashioned costume." The festivities drew some 600 attendees, and the local sponsors asked for permission to hold the 1971 event at Fort Davis. "We have sought methods of re-awakening local interest and participation in the fort, " said Bleser, and "this was not only a good opportunity but it also sounded like it would be a lot of fun." With the coordination of the historical society, the park hosted food booths, "an art show, silent movies, a barbecue, horseshoeing demonstration, games, races, mule-drawn wagon (Army escort) around the playground for the kids, and an excellent concert by the Mount Locke singers." Of special mention was the local response to the call for period costume, "some of which had been worn by mothers or grandfathers in the 19th Century." Bleser joined the staff in old-fashioned outfits, and "the N.Y.C. boys were dressed as pretty passable Apaches," who engaged "a couple of passing soldiers" in sniper fire from the rocks surrounding the fort. The park hosted upwards of 2,000 visitors on that day, and "the main lesson [seemed] to be that next year more of everything is needed." "It is hoped that this can become an annual event," concluded Bleser, as "this year's success has inspired everyone concerned to continue the program and expand it." Smith concurred, hoping that the success of the July 4th commemoration "will establish a precedent for a variety of living history which will continue indefinitely." He also praised Nick Bleser and Mary Williams for the outcome, and asked the regional office to place in their files "a copy of this memorandum . . . as a commendation for an outstanding and ingenious effort in restoring a nineteenth century public use activity to the area." [4]

The staff knew that it alone could not take credit for the success of the 4th of July venue, and that future celebrations would require closer collaboration with the local community. To that end, the park decided to nominate the Fort Davis Historical Society for the recently established "National Park Service Appreciation Award." The park service in late 1971 had begun planning for the 1972 centennial of the creation of Yellowstone National Park, and as part of the overall public relations campaign sought to "recognize the efforts of individuals and organizations that were instrumental in helping to preserve many of the outstanding examples of natural and historic areas that we enjoy throughout the country today." In their nomination of the society, the Fort Davis staff cited the long relationship between local interest in a park site and the financial and political support they offered the NPS. Superintendent Hambly singled out for consideration the society's "efforts on the preservation of local history," as well as their contribution to "added knowledge of fort history." Rounding out his recommendation to the NPS was the staff's declaration that "the Society is also largely responsible for the friendly cooperation, community good will and warm relationships that exist between the citizens of Fort Davis and the National Park Service employees." NPS officials in Washington concurred, bestowing the appreciation award on the historical society on July 18, 1972, with society president Harold Schaafsma, a former superintendent of Great Sand Dunes National Monument who had retired in town, accepting the commendation. [5]

As both the NPS and Fort Davis had now embraced the idea of living history, 1972 offered them the chance to experiment with new ideas and strategies. Derek Hambly discussed with his staff the most pertinent activities that could be staged that year at the park. Their first

priority was the July 4th celebration, followed by "personnel presenting programs, either on-site or off-site," that referred to the Yellowstone centennial "at least once during each presentation." Lesser initiatives included stamping letters at the park with a centennial symbol, listing the birth of the Park Service concept on interpretive literature given to visitors, and the staff's suggestion that "the Centennial Commission consider supplying a plaque of some kind to be set up on information desks to remind the visitor of the celebration." Reflecting the prevalent attitude in the NPS about women's roles in the parks, Fort Davis was asked to develop a program for "area wives." Superintendent Hambly suggested that spouses of the park staff could distribute posters to area businesses and organizations. They could also sell medallions of the centennial at special park occasions. Hambly did ask the wives of his staff what activities most interested them, and learned that "the wives of this area would like very much to correspond with their counterparts in other countries if they can be supplied with the names and addresses of such people." The Fort Davis area women could invite women of foreign nations to visit the United States, and "could possible arrange accommodations for them either at nearby accommodations or in our homes." [6]

Momentum gained through the living history venues and park service focus upon its own past spurred the Fort Davis staff to examine other means of reaching visitors with programs and activities. At the same time, the emphasis of Fort Davis on military life often precluded adoption of broader based interpretation that would include issues of race, gender, and family and community life as these played out in the nineteenth century. Yet the park attempted more than its peers in the region to show the larger dimensions of western history. Albert Schroeder, regional interpretive specialist, visited Fort Davis in the summer of 1973, and offered to Derek Hambly and his employees "our congratulations on the development of your new living history programs on cavalry equipment demonstration, army health and sanitation problems, the role of the frontier army wife, and the making of adobes. " Schroeder also noted that "you are very fortunate in having so many active VIP's (Volunteers in Parks) and EEA's to help you put on these living history programs." The region's chief of interpretation worried that Fort Davis might have to drop some of their activities, and asked Hambly to "please let us know so that other fort areas in our region might consider using some of your ideas." He made special mention of the staffs "two skits on tape," which he called "excellent presentations;" "the one on horse gear," and "the one on troop and Indian life." He praised the imagination of the park employees, and suggested that "you submit these skits, particularly the one on horse gear, for the [regional] interpretive training kit program." [7]

The journey of living history at Fort Davis was not always as smooth as reflected in the plaudits of Albert Schroeder. Doug McChristian contemplated the strengths and weaknesses of the past summer's programs in a memorandum to Derek Hambly in November 1974. The supervisory park ranger judged that season's activities as having gone "fairly well, but did not approach the degree of success for which I had hoped." McChristian cited three reasons for the mixed of living history that year, the first being his own lack of organization and "being tied to a desk too much." He promised Hambly that both he and Mary Williams "will be spending more time out on interpretation and first-hand supervision." McChristian hoped that this would "have the benefits of boosting morale and allow us to quickly correct any problems which may arise." Related to the issue of supervision was the amount of time the ranger spent in "construction and repair of Living History equipment." "Better planning, an early start, and more delegation of duties," he believed, "should make a more smoothly running operation next season." [8]

McChristian's candor and self-criticism did not preclude more searching analysis of the difficulties awaiting Fort Davis in light of limited budgets, staff training, and visitor understanding of history. "Lack of experience on the parts of our interpreters," he informed Hambly, resulted from the fact that "last summer was the first year, I understand, that Living

History was done on a full-scale basis at Fort Davis." "Only two of our people had any prior experience in this type of interpretation," said McChristian, and "that was primarily with the campfire programs." This could be corrected with more training, which McChristian hoped to initiate with the upcoming "Camp of Instruction" the following June at Fort Laramie. The ranger, however, saved his most pointed criticism on the "visitor himself," whom McChristian described as "unprepared for Living History and was, quite often, too lazy to walk to the program site." McChristian suspected that "visitors would like to ask more questions and have more discussions with our interpreters, but lack the knowledge (in the visitors' opinion) to ask us 'worthwhile' questions." His solutions to the passive patron began with having the staff "draw out conversation pertinent to our theme;" a situation that would improve when the interpreters "become more sure of themselves." For his part, McChristian would develop a "photo display at the visitor center to introduce people to our programs and prepare them for the meeting of an 1880s soldier or lady." He could recommend less for the "reluctance of visitors to walk around the fort," with the best option "to have various demonstrations occurring at points around the post in order that the visitor will be 'enticed' to go from point to point, taking a tour of the Fort without being aware of it." [9]

The realization that visitors needed more dramatic interpretations of the frontier military post led McChristian to identify areas of improvement. His first suggestion for living history was to "extend our VIP service in interpreting our furnished officer's quarters." The ranger had noticed the need "to get some of our ladies trained to tell fact instead of fiction and to do more real interpretation of the frontier army family." McChristian found "no great difficulties" in the park's "picket line demonstration at the cavalry corral," and looked for "better training [of] the interpreters" to make them "more knowledgeable of their subject." He spoke highly of "the cooking demonstration performed by Margaret Ellis," which McChristian admitted "came about primarily through her own initiative." The ranger promised that "next year we will have a rudimentary kitchen fixed up in our one remaining original." He wanted the demonstration moved into an indoor kitchen because of the "safety factor of cooking over an open fire." McChristian expressed some chagrin, however, at the public reaction to "our roving 'Apache,'" because he was "often mistaken for a hippie." The park should provide "an established camp scene" to give the employee "better identity and a better opportunity for interpretation of the Indian life-style." McChristian concluded by recognizing the importance of involving the staff in changing the direction of the living history program, and he planned "to write our more distant seasonals and ask for their comments and suggestions." [10]

As Fort Davis worked in the winter of 1973-1974 to advance the cause of living history, the staff again offered ideas that would raise the profile of the park within the community and the park service itself. Derek Hambly received word in November 1973 that the NPS would join other federal agencies in planning for the 1976 event known as the "Bicentennial" of the American Revolution. While far west Texas had little to offer the larger historical agenda focusing upon the events along the Eastern seaboard in the late 18th century, the superintendent suggested instead programs germane to the story of the frontier. His staff wanted to work with Fort Bliss to develop an exhibit "showing 200 years of military activity with emphasis on the western areas." Hambly also hoped to "do something to illustrate the black history with emphasis on the black troops that were stationed at Fort Davis." Finally, the park thought that the July 4th celebration could be expanded to include the towns of Alpine and Marfa. Their goal was "to make this big enough to attract attention from the entire Permian Basin area," thus ensuring more focus during the nation's birthday on the importance of the park service to the citizens of west Texas. [11]

Increased momentum regarding living history required the park to cast its net more widely for advice and information that would render its interpretation distinctive. Doug McChristian asked William Haneman of the Texas state health department for his opinion on Fort Davis'

plans for food demonstrations. The staff wanted to show "the preparation of food by the army, by Apaches, and by an officer's servant," with the diet consisting of "coffee, hardtack, beans, biscuits, and dishes concocted from native plants in the area such as mesquite beans, berries, and prickly pear." The issue of sensitivity to American Indian culture led Mary Williams to inquire of the "tribal historian" of the Mescalero Apache tribe for help "in verifying the type of shelter, clothing and tools we should have and use." Williams wanted to evoke "the 1870-1880 period - a temporary camp such as one that might have been set up in the Davis Mountains for a short period of time." The park staff would construct "a brush ramada rather than a wickiup," with materials consisting of "cottonwood or mesquite poles set in the ground and connected at the top by crosspoles and covered with thatched grass or hay." The park technician also asked for guidance on the dress of the male and female interpreters who would interpret Apache life (the former a "part Mescalero Apache," the latter a "veteran seasonal . . . [who] has never portrayed the role of an Indian before"). Williams strove to integrate Mescalero opinion into the park's historical program, and did not mind if the Mescaleros "corrected" this venture into Native life (the tribe, however, did not respond to these inquiries). [12]

Doug McChristian's promotion of training for better interpretation of the story of Fort Davis led him to attend the 1974 "Camp of Instruction" offered by the park service staff at Fort Laramie National Monument in Wyoming. The Fort Davis ranger sought not only ideas for better historical programs, but also thoughts on developing a similar gathering of NPS rangers the following summer at his own park. His report upon returning from Fort Laramie in July indicated that the experience was valuable, even if it also highlighted shortcomings in the operations to be avoided at Fort Davis. He noted that fatigue affected many attendees, and that alcoholic consumption disturbed those who tried to get sleep in the evenings. "The firing on the range," thought McChristian, "could have been conducted in a more orderly and strict manner for the sake of increased safety;" a condition for which the Fort Davis ranger took blame "as this was my responsibility." As for his colleagues, "it seemed to me that many of our would-be cavalry troopers knew little or nothing about horses and did not really care to learn." McChristian recommended that the next camp assign "stable duty right off," so that attendees "would learn that horses were the first concern of cavalry soldiers and not just a disagreeable detail to be put off until someone else decided to do it." [13]

It was McChristian's suggestion about limiting invitees to the next instruction camp that reveals much about the challenge facing the Park Service in matters of social and cultural sensitivity. The ranger's peers included women, most of whom McChristian described as having "no purpose in being there." The Fort Davis employee was quick to qualify his remarks to the Fort Laramie supervisory historian: "I realize that this sounds quite discriminatory, but that is not my intention." What bothered McChristian was that "women should not be portraying soldiers in Living History interpretation." Presaging an argument about gender and military service nationwide in the 1980s, McChristian offered as his rationale: "Since this particular course is concerned only with military interpretation I can find no justification for sending female seasonals to do it." He conceded that "a female supervisor in charge of such programs would be a legitimate participant." The problem at the Fort Laramie camp was that "none of the six females . . . occupied such positions." One operated the visitor's desk at her park, and McChristian wondered: "How she was going to benefit from a military Living History course is beyond me." The ranger blamed superintendents who sent to the camp "on the opinion that 'any training is better than none.'" McChristian preferred the gender segregation found in the "very appropriate course, 19th Century domestic Arts," which he said "is offered specifically for female interpreters." Compounding the unfairness of uninterested women at the camp was McChristian's supposition that "some male seasonals in real need of this training might have been turned down because the class was already filled." If women could be excluded from the next year's program, the NPS could then drop such classes as "baking . . . in favor of such topics as: the

relationship of privates, non-coms, and officers, the uniform and how to wear it, life on a post, and life on campaign." Baking, McChristian concluded, symbolized the weaknesses of the Fort Laramie experience, and the culinary sessions were "too time consuming for the benefit derived." [14]

McChristian's positive experiences at Fort Laramie outweighed the negatives, as he recommended to Superintendent Hambly that Fort Davis conduct a cavalry "patrol" as part of its Bicentennial activities. This would take a group of riders dressed in period costume and carrying only authentic food and gear, on a route to Van Horn Wells. Many details had to be addressed, such as the need for permission to cross private lands between Fort Davis and the termination point. The superintendent liked the idea, and invited as participants the 3rd Cavalry of Fort Bliss, which would represent the "pre-civil war era," while the "Tenth Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers, Inc." of Los Angeles, could provide both the post-1865 drama and the link to the black units who made Fort Davis prominent in military history circles. Training for this and other Bicentennial venues could come from Fort Davis' own camp of instruction, which McChristian proposed for June 1975. His goal was "to instruct permanent and seasonal employees in the basics of Indian Wars military Living History." The group should consist of no more than 25 NPS and other agency employees who were "planning or are already doing this type of interpretation of the 1865-1890 period." "As a word of caution," McChristian reminded the regional chief of interpretation that "a few people were sent to the Fort Laramie session with, in the opinions of the instructors, little or no justification." While he did not specifically call for the exclusion of women, McChristian believed that "by sending such employees to the Camp, . . . we would be defeating our purpose of upgrading frontier military Living History, and would possibly prevent a person with a real need from attending." [15]

Potential employees of Fort Davis needed to prepare for this massive program of reenactments and historical research, and Superintendent Hambly's letter of November 16, 1974, to Michael Tibbs of Texas A&M University revealed how much the concept of the living past had suffused the work of Fort Davis employees. "At Fort Davis," said Hambly, "there were no great battles or other historically memorable events." This had required the staff to examine "the everyday drudgery of life in a frontier fort." Anyone interested in employment at the park would need a familiarity with "activities such as the operation of a frontier kitchen; drill and fatigue duties of an enlisted man including stable duties, adobe manufacture, wood cutting, and care of livestock; demonstrations or discussions of post medical problems; and the reconstruction of an officers house of the 1880 period." Hambly took pride in the exquisite attention to detail at Fort Davis, where "the post garden supplies vegetables to the kitchen, wood cutting details supply fuel for the kitchen stove, the manufactured adobe brick is later used to replace eroded adobe from the various ruins, . . . and food service was always a sanitary problem for the post surgeon." If all of this work came together into a cohesive dramatization, Hambly assured Tibbs that the visitor would "come away with a better appreciation and knowledge of the hardships, customs, and complexities of the human experience during this segment of American history." [16]

This latter concern about accuracy and realism affected both McChristian's camp of instruction and his cavalry patrol in the spring and summer of 1975. Derek Hambly must have received some comment on his ranger's disapproval of women's participation in the camp, as he told the Fort Union superintendent that "we realize that some of our female interpreters could benefit from such training even though they are not directly involved." Yet Hambly bowed to the wishes of McChristian and other male attendees by limiting the scope of the program to "those actively engaged in interpreting the life of the frontier soldier." For female employees of the federal agency, Hambly noted that "we are working on plans to have a frontier women's course during the bicentennial year of 1976 which will be somewhat discriminatory towards the male interpreters." [17]

Nineteen seventy-five witnessed the maturing of the Fort Davis living history concept, as both the cavalry patrol and camp of instruction met the expectations of McChristian and Hambly. On March 25, McChristian and Joe Garcia of the park staff set out with two members of the Hollywood black soldier stunt unit to traverse the 80 miles from the post to Van Horn Wells. Described by Hambly as "a bicentennial event designed to commemorate the role of the cavalry in the West," the trip proved so successful that McChristian received NPS authorization to repeat the journey that September. On this occasion, he was accompanied by seven additional park service employees from Forts Davis, Laramie, Bowie, Union, and Larned. Regional photographer Fred Mang joined the group to record the occasion for the park service, and McChristian considered the experience "invaluable . . . for any interpreter who is involved in the explanation of military activities of the 1880's." This, coupled with the equally successful camp of instruction, offered NPS employees fortunate enough to attend such "wonderful experiences" as "saddle sores, bad food, heat and wind, and a score of other sensations that these men experienced if only for a week at a time." [18]

With so much attention paid to Doug McChristian's military history venues, it would have been easy for the Fort Davis staff to overlook the central feature of America's 200th birthday: the 4th of July celebration. Indeed, Derek Hambly had learned that "many small, local communities were sponsoring their own Bicentennial celebrations." Yet the attachment of locals to their own festivities at the park brought 2,038 visitors on that day; "a new one day record for the area," said a pleased superintendent. A breathtaking array of events kept the patrons busy all afternoon, from the noon parade that stretched three-quarters of a mile, to the barbecue feast served to 800, guests to the youth rodeo. "Visitors to the Fort," reported Hambly, "ranged in age from a few months to ninety-nine years." "Despite the advance ages of many of the visitors," which when "combined with the heat, and altitude," made health conditions less than ideal, the crowds poured through the restored buildings and visitor center. Hambly's only regret was that the recently refurbished post commissary could not be opened to the public "because of the need to use personnel from that area for traffic control." [19]

Whether through ancillary features like training camps and horse patrols, or community-wide gatherings like the 4th of July, by 1976 living history had become a critical feature of the success of Fort Davis as a unit within the park service. David M. Brugge, chief of the region's division of interpretation and visitor services, came to the park after the July festivities to learn that "Fort Davis has a well-rounded interpretive program with personal services, museum exhibits, demonstrations, wayside devices, publications, and an audio program." "Living history," Brugge further reported, "is emphasized." He noted the departure of Doug McChristian from the staff, and praised Mary Williams, who "has been supervising the interpretive program alone for several months and doing a very good job." The Santa Fe official observed that the "Indian camp, used as a living history project last year, is no longer in use." He recommended the "re-institution of this portion of the program," with "more research and planning" to ensure its accuracy. He also mentioned that "a good paperback book on the Mescalero Apaches is needed, but I know of none to fill this gap." Brugge had similar thoughts on the museum exhibit of the buffalo soldiers, which he believed needed "up-dating to take into account more recently published research." This process of revising the Fort Davis story would also have a salutary effect on the staff, as new ideas and concepts would "help keep up interest and morale, so that the presentations do not become routinized." [20]

As often happens upon completion of some major national historic occurrence, public attention shifts back to more private concerns, leaving those who had devoted time and money in promotion of the American story without the patronage or resources to maximize the investment. Such was the case for the NPS and Fort Davis in the remaining years of the

1970s. In March 1977, the NPS' Denver Service Center asked Kenneth Hornback, chief of the DSC's statistical section, to craft prescriptive attendance figures for the Park Service's two units in the Big Bend/Davis Mountains area. Despite all the attention garnered by living history, Fort Davis could anticipate only modest growth in its patronage. Hornback speculated that, based upon visitor totals from 1967-1976, the old military post would welcome only 70,200 people in 1981, and some 77,000 five years later. These numbers could also plummet to 31,300 (1981) and 19,000 (1986). Part of the problem with Fort Davis was the statistical aberration of the 1966 dedication ceremonies, compounding the national trend downward in visitation due to the mid-1970s gasoline shortages. "It is believed that the local population accounts for a sizeable proportion of the park's visitors," Hornback reported; a situation to be monitored in light of census data showing Jeff Davis County decreasing in numbers. The Denver statistician explained the decline of visitation as the fact that "the novelty of the park has worn off for local visitors." In addition, "the competition resulting from the opening of state parks near Fort Davis during this period" could have played a role, as did the general economic recession. Hornback did offer some good news: "The downward trend is about to bottom out and a slow increase will be seen." He used as his rationale the logic that economic times and energy constraints would eventually improve, as well as the data from the first two months of 1977, where there had been "a four percent increase over the same period for 1976 in cars entering the park, and a two percent increase in visits." [21]

Fort Davis tried in the last years of the decade to sustain the momentum witnessed at the peak of living history's dominance in Park Service historical interpretation. When Robert F. Nichols, regional interpretive specialist and archeologist, came to the park in July 1978, he found that the staff in general maintained enthusiasm for teaching the public about daily life at a frontier post. He judged the quality of the cooperative students that summer "outstanding," and reiterated David Brugge's praise for the work of Mary Williams as supervisor of the seasonal employees. "My personal reaction," Nichols told his superiors in Santa Fe, "was that the living history program at Fort Davis is by far the best such program I have encountered." All this could have been improved, however, if the supervisory park ranger would take more responsibility for the daily management of living history. "The overall program does not have the sort of overall direction it needs," wrote Nichols, resulting in "a natural tendency to slip into the rut of talking about things (naming items) rather than using them to discuss activities, functions and roles." [22]

This situation did not improve as the decade drew to a close. Doug McChristian, now working in the regional office as an interpretive specialist, in conducting the 1979 review of the post's historical activities reiterated Nichols' complaints against the supervisory park ranger. This left the seasonal staff suffering from "a lack of direction and general support." From this, in McChristian's estimation, came "generally low morale and, in some instances, rather mediocre performances by frontline interpreters obviously having high potential." The latter condition was especially evident with those reenacting the life of soldiers, who were "left pretty much to their own devices as to what is worn and used." McChristian was surprised to find that the park had not numbered the various structures and ruins, leaving visitors unable or unwilling "to try to locate themselves and a particular site on the map in the guide." He also echoed Robert Nichols' lament about the "object oriented" nature of the seasonals' presentations. He did extend praise to Mary Williams' strategy to make living history understandable to-children, which she also offered in area schools. Unfortunately, the park did not have suitable reading materials for sale to young people, while it offered such marginal publications as *Arizona Highways*. "Perhaps SPMA could look into the possibility," said McChristian, "of contracting a designer who could produce something [for children] on frontier military/Indian history which could be sold at several outlets." [23]

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FORT DAVIS

Administrative History



Chapter Seven:

Refining the Message, Defending the Resources: The Quest for Institutional Support, 1980-1996

On a crisp fall morning in November 1995, the buildings and grounds of Fort Davis National Historic Site stood as empty as when the post was abandoned a century before. The eerie silence occurred because of the failure of the U.S. Congress and the President to agree on a budget for the federal government. For the third time in 15 years, park personnel were "furloughed," or sent home indefinitely because their parent agency, the Interior department, had received no congressional appropriation with which to operate. Thus the park staff could not fulfill the mission mandated by Congress 35 years earlier to preserve the past for the future, and to instruct the visiting public about the heritage and tradition of the Davis Mountains.

It was fitting that the restored example of the "finest frontier military post in the Southwest" had no visitors or staff in the week before Thanksgiving, as the last two decades of the twentieth century bore little resemblance to Fort Davis' first 20 years of existence. A more conservative political climate under the presidential administrations of Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Bill Clinton reduced spending overall to public agencies. This meant that parks like Fort Davis would receive less attention and funding, especially as Congress continued to establish new units of the park service. From personnel to preservation to interpretive services, the staff and management of Fort Davis spent much of the latter part of the century consolidating the gains of the 1960s and 1970s, while trying to find more creative means to advance the cause of history in the far Southwest. [1]

The four superintendents that managed Fort Davis in its third and fourth decades of existence all faced the challenge of enhancing the richness and variety of historic resources that the park service had inherited and preserved. From Doug McChristian (1980-1986) to Steve Miller (1986-1988) to Kevin Cheri (1988- 1992) to Jerry Yarbrough (1992-present), the park's directors and staff knew that they would not soon return to the days of 1960s restoration, or the excitement of creating the living history programs of the 1970s. Perusal of their correspondence and reports, along with oral interviews, indicates the maturing process of Fort Davis as a park service unit, along with the need for staff and managers alike to be ever more thoughtful in meeting the needs of visitors and guarding the historical tradition of the old frontier post. This process began in the spring of 1980, when former supervisory ranger Doug McChristian returned to manage the park. In a 1994 interview, McChristian remembered how he wished to "influence the history of an area," and how concerned he had been as a special assistant in the Southwest Regional Office about the "decline of quality in the living history program." His first objective became the revitalization of the work that he and Mary Williams had undertaken in the early 1970s to bring the past to life, with better maintenance of the ruins and their foundations as allied priorities. [2]



Figure 42. Superintendent Doug McChristian (1985).
Courtesy Fort Davis NHS.

McChristian's personnel, like many public officials in the early 1980s, found it difficult to accept the political rhetoric ushered in by the so-called "Reagan Revolution." The conservative Republican had swept to victory in the 1980 election by promising to "get government off the backs of the American people," and suggesting that those employed in public service did not measure up to the standards of the private sector. Reagan's promise to reduce federal spending for domestic programs, and expand dramatically the appropriations for the nation's armed forces, marked a significant shift in emphasis from the more generous spending habits of the Democrats in the White House and Congress. Compounding this was Reagan's choice as Interior secretary James Watt, an arch-conservative lawyer from Wyoming whose Mountain States Legal Foundation had championed the causes of the "Sagebrush Rebellion;" a 1970s protest movement originating in the public land states of the arid West, with citizens outraged at the regulatory power of federal officials and their perceived insensitivity towards the property rights of individual landowners. [3]

Even before the inauguration of Ronald Reagan in January 1981, Supervisory Park Ranger James A. Blackburn had to issue a memorandum to the staff entitled, "Support for Public Policy." He had noticed that "certain remarks made by employees in the presence of visitors have not thoroughly supported public policy of the United States Government." Conceding that his staff had the right of free speech, Blackburn nonetheless wanted no one "making remarks that might lead a visitor or other employee to feel that we do not care for the job or policy of our government (our employer)." The supervisory ranger recognized "the austerity of our present financial posture;" a condition that he agreed had "resulted in curtailed programs and reduced visitor services in the area of interpretation." Yet the Fort Davis staff "have not reduced our visitor services when it comes to quality -- if anything, we are constantly improving quality." Blackburn asked his colleagues "to provide our visitors with a

positive outlook," and "to curtail negativism." If the staff would "all take a look at ourselves," they would realize that "we all experience some dissatisfaction with the restraints imposed upon us." Yet "we can gain public support," said the ranger, "by portraying to our visitors a can-do attitude; one that says we are aware of certain limitations in funding and personnel," and one that would keep "this dissatisfaction from showing to our visitors." [4]

The superintendent had to acknowledge that the ambition of the NPS in the 1960s had given way to a more conservative time. In the 1970s, the Park Service had refurnished several buildings at Fort Davis, including an officer's quarters, a kitchen and servants' quarters, and the post commissary. Yet these facilities required personnel to interpret their story to the visiting public, and historians to research that story. McChristian soon realized upon his return to Fort Davis that one reason for the perceived "decline" in living history was the reduction in staff in the late 1970s. In a memorandum to the regional office in March 1981, the superintendent provided a table of hiring trends since 1975. In the division of interpretation, for example, there had been ten seasonals that year, along with two permanent staff and three "Cooperative Education" employees. By 1980 the Park Service, responding to declines in congressional support, reduced the number of workers at the park. The regional office also lowered the pay grades for new hires; a pattern that McChristian called "a false economy because it naturally tended to lower the quality of programs and caused some activities to be canceled entirely." A second indicator of the fiscal constraints of the 1970s was the requirement by Congress that the NPS absorb the "Classified Pay Increase" (CPI) in each park's operating budget. Rampant inflation in the years after the conflict in Vietnam had driven consumer prices and wages upward in a seemingly endless spiral, as much a function of the rise in energy prices as in the explosion of government spending criticized by conservative politicians. McChristian would thus have to find money in his allocation from Santa Fe to cover 60 percent of the staffs pay raises; a situation that he called "the single most [important] factor adversely affecting the park's funding." This meant no hiring of seasonals for the summer of 1981, delays in standard maintenance procedures (such as mowing the grounds, painting the trim on buildings, clearing of nature trails, etc.). [5]

Since a commitment to public service was a hallmark of the NPS, and because Fort Davis represented a signal achievement in living history interpretation, McChristian decided to press forward with as thorough a program of storytelling, reenactments, and scholarly research as his budget limitations allowed. In May 1980, he provided his staff with a clear explanation of his principles and goals. "I believe that we have an obligation to insure that what [the visitors] are seeing, touching, tasting, and so forth," said the superintendent, "is a worthy substitute for the real thing." He challenged the idea that "visitors won't know the difference anyway" by suggesting that it was "unprofessional" and misleading to the public to denigrate the personal nature of living history. "Visitors look to us as the experts," said McChristian, "and depend upon us to be correct." He extended the quest for "authenticity" to the daily dress of his staff "from the skin out," mindful that wool undergarments were "often uncomfortable at first to a 20th Century person." Nonetheless, accuracy in detail meant "interpreting life by their standards [the nineteenth-century frontier]," so that the staff could dramatize to visitors "the contrasts between the quality of life then and now, changes in style and custom, health factors, and the uses of energy as contrasted with the present day." [6]

Interpreting the authenticity of Fort Davis through living history led McChristian to develop plans to study other aspects of the park's natural and cultural resources. He asked Dr. James T. Nelson, professor of range animal science at Sul Ross State University, to undertake a vegetation study "to recreate and maintain the natural features" that "accurately reflect the historic scene of the late 19th century." The superintendent needed base maps of vegetation such as "grasses, trees, shrubs, and cacti." He also wanted to know of the "various vegetative zones," the plant life "now present but exotic to the area," and those plants "not present but.. probably a part of the historic scene." Yet Fort Davis also faced intrusion into the serenity of

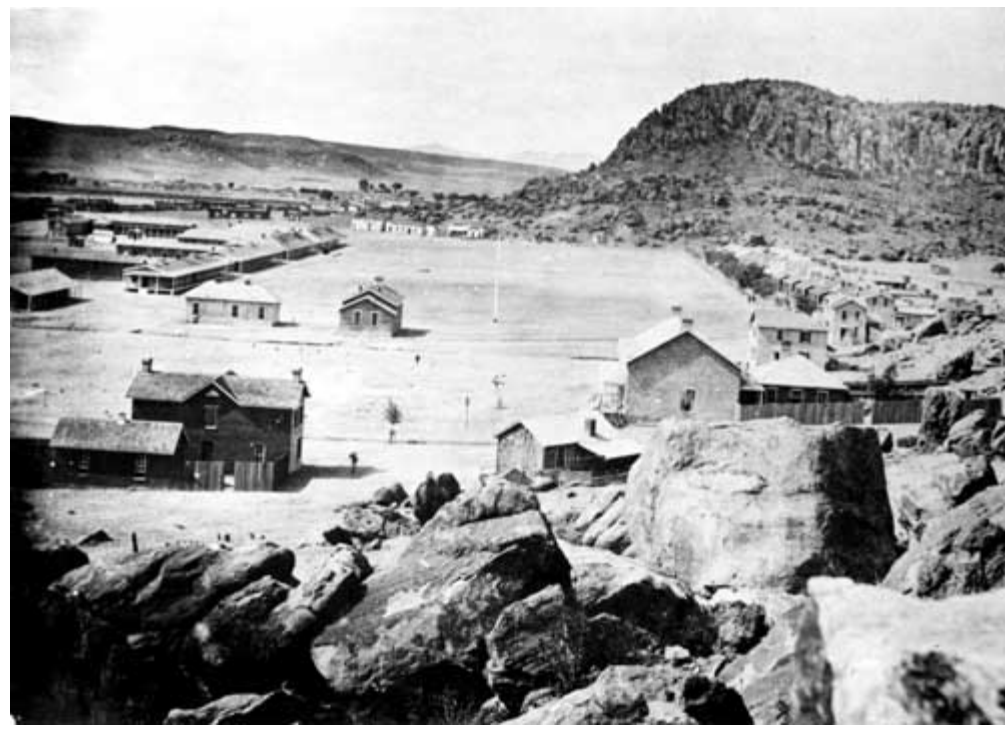
the park with the increase of Air Force flight testing in the Davis Mountains. Superintendent McChristian had to write in February 1981 to Colonel Harold Dortch, commander of Tactical Training at Holloman Air Force Base (HAFB), to complain as his predecessors had of the "sonic booms" occurring as part of the overflights of high-speed aircraft. "I hope that you share our concern for preserving our nation's military history," said McChristian, since "a public that has the opportunity of understanding our military's role and traditions are more likely to be supportive of its actions today." The Air Force, however, did not respond to the superintendent's entreaties, leading McChristian in November 1981 to complain to regional officials: "Apparently, the Air Force would like me to believe that I am imagining things." McChristian and his staff contended that "when one hears a thunderbolt-like crack from a cloudless sky and feels the entire building tremble, he can assume either an F-15 has overflown the area or that the Almighty is upset with the National Park Service." The staff thus had no choice but to record the time and date of the sonic booms, since "until we have hard evidence upon which to base our complaint, we cannot present a convincing case for claiming possible damage to the structures at Fort Davis." [7]

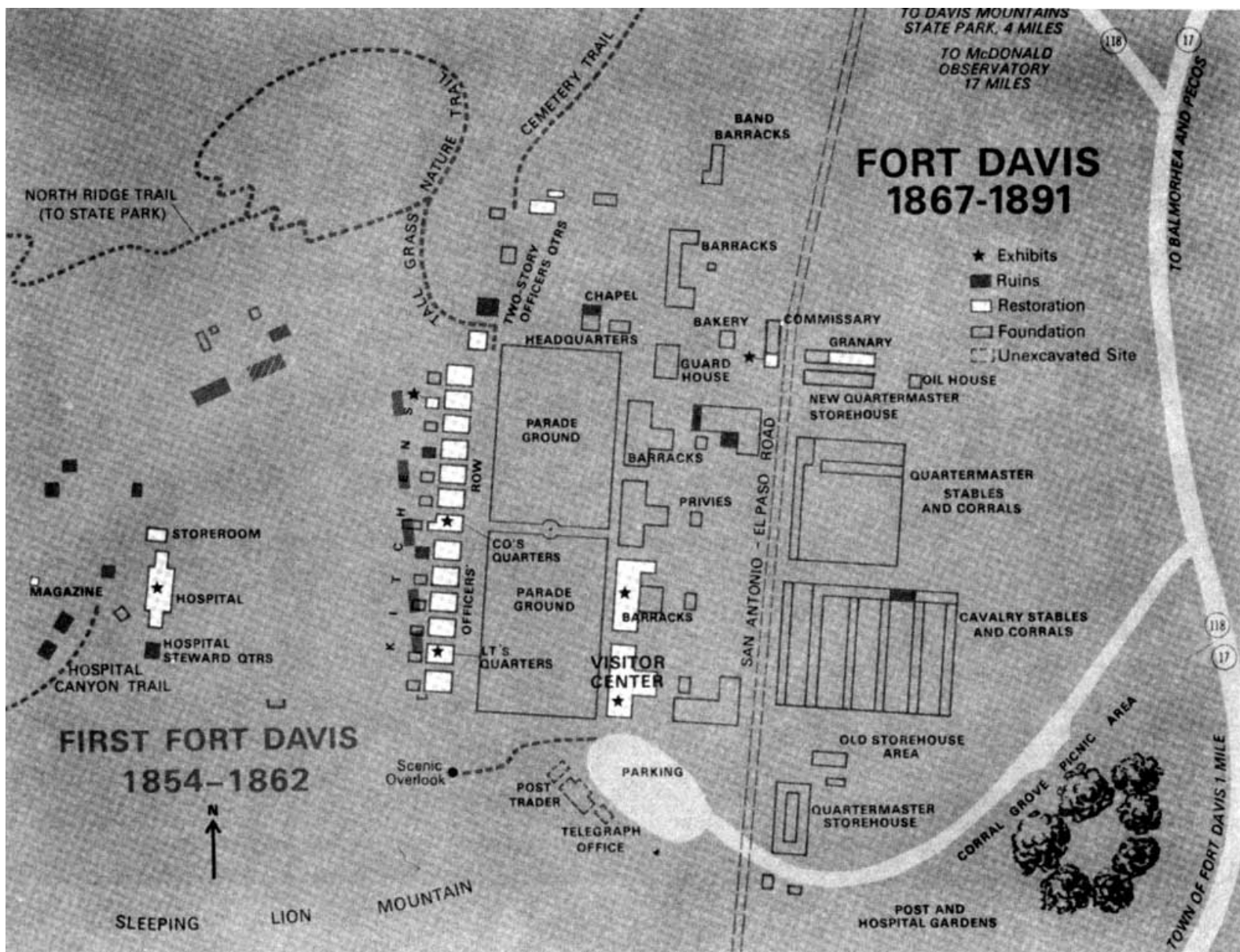
A critical factor for the staff and management of the park was the continued imbalance of interpretation of the black experience at the post. Prompted by the NPS' inquiry about Fort Davis' "Minority Interpretation Action Plan," the staff discussed in 1980 what Mary Williams described as "the positive and negative aspects of our interpretive programs as they effect and are affected by minority cultures." As part of Doug McChristian's call for more authenticity in telling the Fort Davis story, the staff reviewed its exhibits, collections, publications, and interpretive presentations. They discovered, for example, that two slides in the museum audio-video program that supposedly depicted black troopers of the 9th Cavalry "actually were of white soldiers." The noted Southwestern artist Rogers Aston donated to Fort Davis "two beautiful historically accurate bronzes - one of an Apache Indian and the other of a Buffalo Soldier." Mary Williams acknowledged that these statues replaced "a large copy of a [Frederick] Remington sketch of an Apache and a Buffalo Soldier" because the original, "like some of Remington's other sketches of black men, . . . depicted the Buffalo Soldier as a very physically unattractive person." Fort Davis also redesigned the "shared officers' quarters" to represent the rooms of Lieutenant Henry Flipper, and also examined the possibility of commemorating in 1981 the centennial of Flipper's court martial. Less successful were the staffs efforts to hire a black seasonal. One young man from Howard University in Washington, DC, wrote that he could not afford to move to Fort Davis, while a second student from Tuskegee Institute in Alabama reported that "because of personal problems he could not accept the appointment." Fort Davis then turned to Sul Ross for help, but "no qualified black students have expressed any interest in the program." [8]

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FORT DAVIS

Administrative History



Chapter One:

Fort Davis and the Western Story (continued)

The return of Union forces to west Texas took some time, as the war in the East moved toward closure in 1864-1865. The departmental commander of New Mexico, Brigadier General James H. Carleton, had sent down from Santa Fe in September 1862 a party under the command of Captain E.D. Shirland. The Union troops found Fort Davis mostly in ruins, with furnishings and supplies sold by the CSA to the Hispanic residents of the border. Not until 1865 would Army forces reoccupy the west Texas region, and even then the focus was on either the presence in Mexico of French troops under the leadership of Maximilian, or the need to implement the policies of Reconstruction in eastern Texas. Yet the quickened pace of travel along the San Antonio-El Paso road after the war brought a new round of Indian raiding, which the Army met in 1867 by reopening Fort Davis. Two years later the post had become the headquarters for the Presidio command of the 5th Military District of Texas, and the fort would remain in operation throughout the height of the Indian wars of the 1870s and 1880s.

By orders of the Department of Texas, the Army staffed Fort Davis in 1867 with companies of the Ninth Cavalry, composed of black soldiers recruited for the segregated units created after 1866 to permit freed slaves to serve their country in uniform (as they had done in the latter stages of the Civil War). Eventually all four black units would be assigned to Fort Davis: the 9th and 10th Cavalry, and the 24th and 25th Infantry. Led at first by Lieutenant Colonel Wesley Merritt, a Civil War hero, the 9th Cavalry had over 50 percent Civil War veterans. The fort contributed to the re-establishment of the nation's military presence throughout west Texas and southern New Mexico, with several posts housing black troopers. Merritt set his soldiers and civilian employees to work rebuilding Fort Davis outside the canyon walls of the first site, using two steam-powered sawmills to cut timber. Soldiers also quarried sandstone from the nearby cliffs, and burned lime for mortar at the post.

Expansion of the fort led to more encounters with Indians in the Trans-Pecos (19 in all from 1869-1877), which in turn drew attention to the security provided by Fort Davis. In 1871 Lieutenant Colonel William ("Pecos Bill") Shafter took command as increased Indian activities throughout west Texas reduced the fort to 110 soldiers. Shafter's successor, Colonel George Andrews, commanded Fort Davis from 1872-1878, and sent out few parties to fight Indians. Much of the black troopers' duty involved protecting the stage and mail stations and routes, along with construction work at Fort Davis. By the late 1870s the troopers had worked on military road construction, and strung 91 miles of telegraph wire as part of the El Paso-San Antonio communication link. Robert Wooster, in his *History of Fort Davis, Texas* (1990), noted that many civilians in the area were white CSA sympathizers who saw the Army as a symbol of their defeat, while free black soldiers were reminders of the "lost world" of the Confederacy. Often the stage and mail drivers disliked the black Army escorts, even though the stage company owners preferred to use soldiers rather than pay for their own scouts and guards.

The volume of Indian raiding did not abate throughout the early 1870s, and at one point

officials from the U.S. customs office and the Office of Indian Affairs called for removal of troops from Fort Davis to Presidio. The state of Texas stepped in to help the U.S. Army with law enforcement on the frontier, dispatching in 1880 a unit of the famed "Texas Rangers" to Fort Davis. Like their civilian counterparts, the Rangers were often rebel veterans who opposed the presence of black soldiers in west Texas. Despite this attitude, the Army commanders not only continued the use of the 9th Cavalry; they also employed in the 1870s members of the famed "Seminole Negro scouts," formed by blacks intermarried with Seminole Indians who had fled the Indian Territory before 1860 to find shelter in Mexico. The scouts worked out of several posts in west Texas, and provided invaluable service with their stamina, knowledge of the land and of Indian ways, and their seeming indifference to the racial animosity generated by their presence. [2]

Activity at Fort Davis reached its peak in 1880, when the prominent Warm Springs chief, Victorio, refused to return to the Apache reservation at San Carlos, Arizona. He wished instead to have a reservation at Ojo Caliente in the San Mateo Mountains. John Briggs, a post guide at Fort Davis, was sent to inspect the Mescalero reservation in response to rumors that it had become a supply center for potential outbreaks by Mescaleros and Chiricahuas. The latter bands, led by Geronimo, had frightened settlers from Tucson to El Paso in the 1870s, and fears remained that they would seek shelter in the mountainous areas along the Mexican border. The Army in anticipation of this action also built in August 1879 Camp Pena Colorado, a "sub-post" to the east of Fort Davis (south of modern-day Marathon). On July 30, 1880, U.S. forces under the command of Colonel Benjamin Grierson, soon to become commander at Fort Davis, met Victorio's band at the Battle of Tinaja de las Palmas, south of the modern-day Sierra Blanca. After another fight with Victorio north of Van Horn, Texas, (Rattlesnake Springs), Victorio withdrew across the Rio Grande. Grierson's troops drove Victorio into Mexico, where Mexican soldiers under Colonel Joaquin Terrazas killed him in battle. Fort Davis and the Trans-Pecos would see no more major confrontations with the Apaches, although on October 18, 1880 a band of Apaches under the war chief Nana stole horses from the fort's grazing pasture.

Perhaps because of the strong presence of U.S. forces in the Davis mountains, Fort Davis did not experience the engagement of places like the Little Bighorn Battlefield, Big Hole Battlefield, and other western military historic sites now managed by the National Park Service. Yet life at the post in the years after the Civil War, especially beyond 1880, was at once tedious and colorful. Robert Wooster defined "health, race, and discipline" as the critical variables for commanders and soldiers alike at the fort. As a frontier site, Fort Davis (both town and post) had its share of violence and conflict; both exacerbated by the awkward presence of black troopers in large numbers. Wooster noted the story that the Jesse Evans gang, led by an associate of the New Mexican outlaw, Billy the Kid, had come down in 1880 from the Lincoln County wars to harass the citizenry of the Davis Mountains. The Texas Rangers based at Fort Davis had captured Evans, and rumors flew that the "Kid" would appear in town to rescue his friend. No such event transpired, but its potential demonstrated the uncertainty of law and order in the Trans-Pecos area in the late nineteenth century.

Matters of hygiene and health care, always a problem in the close quarters of military life, underwent scrutiny at Fort Davis because of the post's isolation and difficult mission. Assistant Surgeon Daniel Wiesel came to Fort Davis in 1868 with orders to improve conditions of diet, exercise, and personal cleanliness. He instituted a post garden tended by soldiers to increase the supply of fresh fruits and vegetables, and also prescribed more bathing in Limpia Creek to ward off parasites and germs. Under Wiesel, the mortality rate at Fort Davis was one-third of the Army's average, as was the rate of illness. Medical discharge, a common problem throughout the service, stood at Fort Davis at 60 percent of the service average. Wiesel and his successors, however, had less opportunity to reduce the scourge of alcoholism, which afflicted all military posts in the West.

Racial dynamics posed their share of challenges to the staff and line of Fort Davis, given the post's location near Mexico, its hosting of the black units of a segregated Army, and the isolated conditions that bred both cultural accommodation and cultural stress. Intermarriage between soldiers and local women was usually limited to black-Hispanic liaisons; a situation somewhat surprising given Texas' proscriptions on interracial marriage. More sensational for Fort Davis, however, was the celebrated court-martial in 1881 of the post commissary officer, Second Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper, the first black graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Upon graduation from the academy in 1877, Flipper had served at Fort Sill, Indian Territory, under the future Fort Davis commander, Colonel Benjamin Grierson. Flipper came to Fort Davis in 1880, but less than one year later faced charges of mismanagement of post funds. His books were poorly kept, and he could not account for \$2,400 in receipts. He sought to cover the shortfall with royalty payments pending from his upcoming autobiography; a situation which never materialized. Post gossip held that Flipper had been too bold with the sister of one of the white officers at the fort, escorting her on buggy rides on Sunday afternoons that scandalized other officers and white citizens in town. At his court-martial hearing, held in the post chapel, other residents of Fort Davis collected over \$1,700 in one day to help Flipper meet his expenses, but the military tribunal stripped him of his commission for "conduct unbecoming of an officer and a gentleman." Flipper then left the service and moved to El Paso, and started a second career in the Southwest and in Mexico as a mining engineer and translator of Spanish.

The irony of the Flipper experience was that on balance, black soldiers had more opportunity within the service than they would have had as civilians in segregated Texas. The post chaplains held classes in the chapel for soldiers who wanted to learn to read and write; something denied by the mid-1870s to many blacks in both the North and South as Reconstruction came to an end. The post library boasted in 1876 a total of 1,600 volumes, and soldiers and officers alike utilized its services. Then under the command of Colonel Grierson (1882-1885), Fort Davis witnessed its last major initiative for upgrading and improvement of facilities to benefit the lives of the soldiers. Grierson well known for his Indian-fighting and his support of black units, arrived in the Davis Mountains after the major confrontations with Indians had ended. General William T. Sherman, commanding general of the Army, had wanted to locate all primary western posts along railroad routes for matters of efficiency and economy of service. This jeopardized Fort Davis, as the Army in 1884 made Camp Pena Colorado a separate post, built Camp Rice (near old Fort Quitman) in 1882 as a subpost of Fort Davis, and even stationed Fort Davis troops for a time in 1882-1883 at Presidio.

Under Colonel Grierson, Fort Davis held off these encroachments, and expanded its troop strength in 1884 to 39 officers and 643 men. The commander also petitioned his superiors to expend \$81,000 for post improvements from 1882-1885, not all of which he received. At the same time, Grierson was motivated (like other officers of the day) by a desire for his own financial security. A larger post, with more construction work for local contractors, would also create the impression of economic vitality that would draw new settlers. The colonel set out to purchase or lease lands in the Trans-Pecos area, owning at one time nearly 45,000 acres, which included 126 town lots in the community of Valentine, west of Fort Davis on the road to El Paso. In like manner, the commander of the black Seminole scouts, Lieutenant John Bullis, acquired title to 53,500 acres of land in Pecos County to the north of the post.

Fort Davis and the surrounding area never grew as Grierson had hoped, even though he and his family labored to put down roots in the Davis Mountains. Opportunities for his soldiers also slipped away as the Indian wars began to fade from memory, making Fort Davis vulnerable to budget-cutting officials in the War Department and the administration of President Grover Cleveland. Grierson and his officers were also aware of the Hispanic "red-

light" district one half mile north of the post called "Chihuahua." By 1880 the town of Fort Davis (some 792 people) would be over 67 percent Hispanic. There soldiers found entertainment, excitement, and sin in equal measure away from the prying eyes of the white townsfolk or of their own officers.

By 1885 Grierson realized that his tenure at Fort Davis would be limited, and in March the 10th Cavalry received orders to transfer to Whipple Barracks in north-central Arizona. There they would participate in the campaign in Mexico to find Geronimo, while their white replacements, the Third Cavalry, would oversee the gradual abandonment of the fort on Limpia Creek. The post-military future of Fort Davis was already arriving, as in the late-1880s a Presbyterian minister named William Bloys would preach in the post chapel on alternate Sundays with Methodist and Baptist clergy. The town also clung to its Republican sympathies, given the long relationship with military personnel and defense spending in the Davis Mountains. Conditions deteriorated as budget cuts made it more difficult to maintain the adobe structures, and the limited water supply contributed to diseases like dysentery. Once the last scout for Indians was completed in February 1888, it would be but a matter of time before the U.S. Army called upon Fort Davis to close its doors.

The decision to deactivate one of the West's more celebrated posts came in 1891, when Secretary of War Redfield Proctor realigned the West's military installations. The last major encounter between the Army and Indian resistance had ended at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in December 1890. While tragic, this incident had reminded military officials that few tribes any longer posed a threat to the well-being of American settlement. Fort Davis, isolated and distant from railroad traffic (the nearest railhead was 20 miles southwest at Marfa), and situated on land that the military did not own, thus became a casualty of the changing dynamics of western military defense. In an interesting twist, the local elite did not engage in the supplication familiar to many other western communities in danger of losing their major source of federal income. Perhaps because most of the community was non-white, there was little awareness of the means of influencing the federal government to maintain a military post that the service no longer found useful. Perhaps the low incomes of Fort Davis residents also kept them from funding a full-scale lobbying effort. Perhaps the small number of concerned citizens limited their appeal. For whatever reason, in June 1891 the last soldiers marched out of the post and down Limpia Creek on their way to history.

Those soldiers, settlers, and service workers at Fort Davis could not have known of the fascination that was already building among military buffs and historians alike for the rapidly disappearing western frontier, and its symbols of conquest and achievement. It is not surprising that two years after the closure of Fort Davis, a young history professor from the University of Wisconsin, Frederick Jackson Turner, would deliver to an audience of academics in Chicago his now-famous "Frontier thesis." In that forty-page treatise marked by powerful phraseology and sweeping generalization, Turner would speak as much to the uncertain future of large urban centers, advanced technology, and the impersonal nature of twentieth century life, as he would the bygone days of forests, fields, and streams of the "mythic West" of his youth. The longing for a simpler life that Turner suggested to his listeners (and later legions of readers) might explain how the struggle of soldiers at Fort Davis to wrest the Trans-Pecos wilderness from nature and the Native bands who called it home would become, some three generations later, the location of Fort Davis National Historic Site.

VISITATION STATISTICS

FORT DAVIS NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

1963-1995

Year	Total	Year	Total
1963	64,321	1980	63,569
1964	86,565	1981	71,351
1965	107,866	1982	75,056
1966	135,769	1983	71,424
1967	127,647	1984	69,246
1968	123,509	1985	68,480
1969	98,937	1986*	63,996
1970	100,070	1987	52,297
1971	84,175	1988	54,775
1972	79,839	1989	55,098
1973	58,315	1990	56,619
1974	53,029	1991	67,028
1975	67,104	1992	73,659
1976	63,514	1993	71,699
1977	70,018	1994	69,676
1978	68,388	1995	61,324
1979	72,762		

*Beginning in 1986, Fort Davis changed its method of recording visitors to the park from a traffic counter to counting visitors in the visitor center.

Figure 3. Visitation Data for Fort Davis (1963-1995). Courtesy Fort Davis NHS.



