

# Fort Scott

National Historic Site  
Kansas

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



**Guidon**  
A guidon identified each company in the regiment. Made of silk, it measured 2 feet 3 inches by 3½ feet. It was carried on a lance by the first corporal.



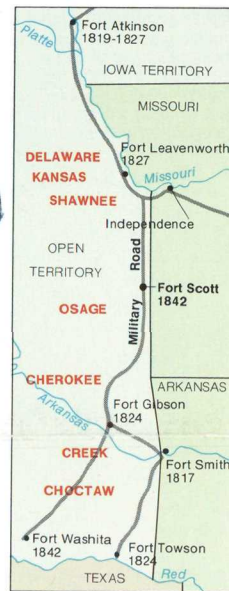
**Insignia**  
The dragoons' insignia, which they wore on their dress caps, was a gilt star with a superimposed silver eagle. It is about 5 inches high. The design is Napoleonic.



**The Post Community**  
These figures by an artist suggest the diversity of the garrison at Fort Scott. The dragoon officer, in full dress uniform at left, was one of the most resplendent military figures of the day. His lady

often rivaled her husband's display during Sunday promenades. The post sutler was familiar to soldiers and civilians alike. His store stocked all kinds of luxuries—candy, tobacco, whiskey,

playing cards, cloth, boots and shoes—not usually available through the quartermaster. The sergeant at right was a mainstay of the infantry ranks.



**The Middle Border**  
A military road, begun in 1836, connected the army posts built along the Indian border. When finished in 1844, it stretched over 800 miles from Minnesota to the Red River in Louisiana.



**Training**  
Drill was a large part of every dragoon's life. He drilled nearly every day in garrison on his horsemanship and individual skills and as part of his platoon, squadron, and regiment. In the exercise



called 'running at the heads,' dragoons practiced with the pistol and saber on a course set with dummy heads on posts. These figures are from the Army's *Cavalry Tactics*, 1841.



Osage dance coat



**The Osage**  
The Osage, according to the artist George Catlin who visited them in the 1830s, were a handsome people, tall, well-proportioned, graceful and quick in movement. Good warriors and hunt-

ers, they were the dominant tribe in this region before the advent of the white man. By the 1840s they posed no military threat to the border. They came often to the fort to trade, and the dra-

goons frequently rode onto their land to evict squatters. Above are Catlin's portraits of Tal-Lee, a warrior, and Clermont, head chief of the tribe. The shield is Osage, made of buffalo.

## Policing the Frontier

In its brief but varied life, Fort Scott mirrored the course of western settlement along the middle border. From 1842-53, troops from this post helped keep peace on the Indian frontier. Between 1854 and 1861, the years of 'Bleeding Kansas,' the fort and town were caught up in the violent struggle between 'free-soilers' and slave-holders. During the Civil War, the fort became an important supply center for Union armies in the West. In the 1870s, the U.S. Army returned to the town of Fort Scott, this time to protect workers building a railroad across disputed land.

When the army established this fort, this was Indian country, the ancestral land of the Osage, but assigned in recent years to eastern tribes that the government had exiled westward beyond the line of white settlement. This line was known as 'the permanent Indian frontier.' It was garrisoned at intervals from Minnesota to

Louisiana by forts manned by infantry and a special breed of mounted troops, the colorfully dressed, heavily armed dragoons, trained to fight on foot and well suited to take on the superb horsemen of the Plains tribes.

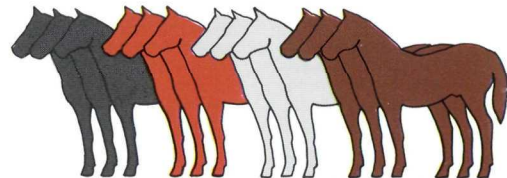
In 1842 two companies of dragoons—about 130 officers and men—arrived at this site and began putting up the first quarters. The new post (named for Gen. Winfield Scott) stood on a bluff, surrounded by prairie and rolling hills. Strategically, it filled the gap between Fort Leavenworth (built 1827) in northern Kansas and Fort Gibson (1824) 150 miles south. The fort was planned around a spacious parade-ground. Officers' quarters lined one side, dragoon barracks and stables another. Most buildings were frame, Greek Revival in style, and comfortable, with high ceilings, walnut woodwork, porches, and fireplaces. By 1848 the fort we see today was essentially finished.

The fort's primary purpose was to keep peace between the relocated Indians from the east, nomadic tribes, and white settlers. As it turned out, the Indians were quiet, and the main duties were to guard caravans on the Santa Fe Trail and patrol the far Indian country. Two expeditions rode escort on the trail in 1843, and the next year dragoons from Scott and Leavenworth marched into Pawnee country to try to end fighting between that tribe and the Sioux. These campaigns were a rehearsal for the great expedition of 1845 under Stephen W. Kearny, who marched his horse soldiers 2200 miles in 99 days in a grand tour of the wilderness empire of the Plains Indians.

While the dragoons were showing the flag on the Plains, events in Texas were drifting toward war with Mexico. Part of Scott's dragoons marched with Kearny into California, part served with Zachary Taylor at Buena Vista.



**Capt. Benjamin Moore**  
The first post commander, Moore helped select the fort site and took part in several expeditions into Indian country. While serving under Kearny in California in 1846, he was killed at the battle of San Pasqual.



Black Chestnut Gray Bay

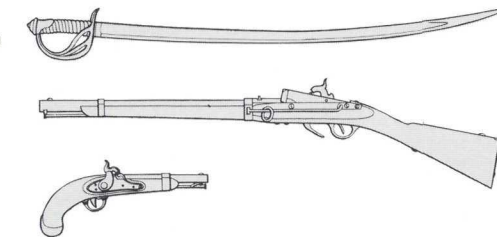
**Horse Colors**  
When the Regiment of Dragoons was organized in 1833, colors were designated for the horses of each company: black for A and K; chestnut for B, F, and H; bay for C, D, E, and I; and gray for G. Troopers liked horses of a solid color best, with no

white noses or feet. One veteran was firm in what he wanted in horsetlesh: 'Sound feet, flat, sinewy legs, sound hocks and knees, arms and quarters well muscled, short, sinewy back, high withers, rangy neck, bony head, bold eye...deep chest.'

**Dragoon Private**  
Dragoons were the elite troops of the frontier army. Trained to fight either on foot or horseback, they were employed to keep peace along the border, patrol the trail west, explore unmapped territory, and show American power

among the Plains tribes. The private illustrated above is wearing the field uniform of the 1840s. He is armed with the breech-loading Hall carbine (the first percussion firearm adopted by the army), a single-shot pistol, and the dragoon saber, an

arm more traditional than useful in Plains combat. His weaponry and his ability to fight in disciplined formations awed the Indians, who were not anxious to engage dragoons in battle and rarely did.



**Weapons**  
Most dragoons went into the field with the weapons at left: the 1840 heavy sabre, known as 'old wristbreaker'; the Hall carbine, .52 caliber, and the 1842 percussion pistol, .54 caliber.

# Fort Scott

Follow this map for a close look at the fort and the life of the frontier army. The main buildings are numbered below and briefly identified at right.

**1** Built in 1843 for the treatment of the sick and wounded, now used as the fort's visitor center. One of the two original wards is refurbished. *Restoration*

**2** The original barracks on this site was constructed in 1844, some work being done by units of the 4th Infantry. The present building houses a museum. *Reconstruction*

**3** The original stables (built 1843) held over 80 stalls for horses and several rooms for storing feed, tack, and hay. *Reconstruction*

**4** First occupied by Co. A of the 1st Dragoons in 1844. The soldiers bunked on the upper level, took their meals in the mess hall on the ground floor. *Reconstruction*

**5** The commanding officer and his adjutant ran the post from this building. It held their offices, a court-martial room, and storerooms for artillery. *Reconstruction*

**6** Officers and their families lived comfortably in houses like this. Captain Swords and his wife occupied one unit of this duplex. *Restoration*

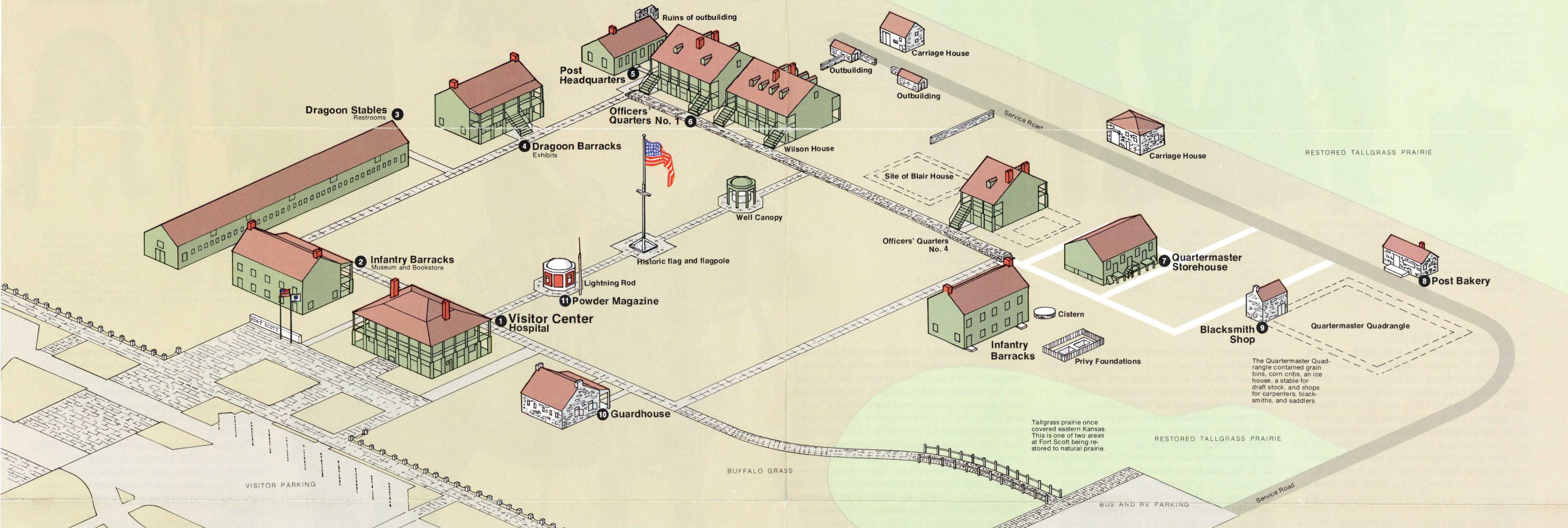
**7** The post's diverse military supplies—everything needed to put a fighting force into the field—were delivered to, stored in, and issued from this building. *Restoration*

**8** Bread was a staple of the soldier's diet. His daily ration (18 ounces) was baked in ovens here by bakers chosen from each company on a rotating basis. *Restoration*

**9** This shop is the only original structure remaining from the Quartermaster Quadrangle. *Restoration*

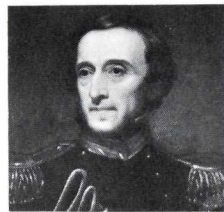
**10** Military discipline was strict in the frontier army. Solitary confinement and a diet of bread and water were common punishments for enlisted men. *Reconstruction*

**11** The magazine, completed in 1844 and demolished in 1868, gave safe storage to the fort's explosives: powder, cartridges, fuses, and primers. *Reconstruction*



## Building the Fort

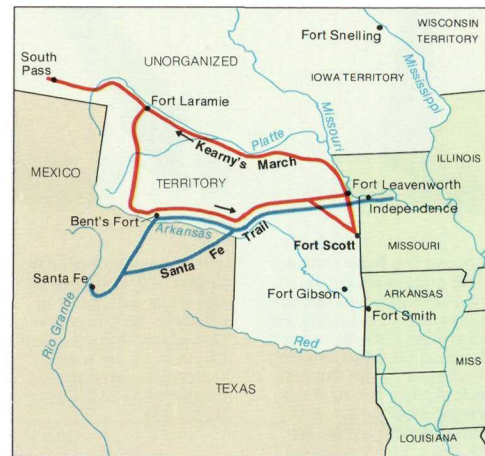
The soldiers themselves, assisted by a comparatively few skilled craftsmen, built the fort. The raw materials were close by. Walnut, ash, and oak grew thickly along the bottom lands of the Marmaton, and there was stone in the hills around. Capt. Thomas Swords (right), the post quartermaster from 1842-46, directed most of the construction. He built barracks for the enlisted men, houses for the officers, stables for the horses, a hospital, a magazine, and the various storehouses and support buildings required by an isolated post. Most of the buildings went up within



a few years. But work soon slowed to a crawl for lack of men, money, and materials before ceasing entirely in 1850. All told, the fort cost about \$32,000, a low figure even for those times and indicative of how little the Nation was willing to spend on the frontier army.

## The Kearny Expedition

Kearny's sweep through the high Plains in the summer of 1845 was a skillful display of dragoon power. Gathering 5 companies of the 1st Dragoons—including Co. A from Fort Scott—Kearny led them up the Platte to Fort Laramie and beyond, down the Rockies to the Arkansas, and home again over the Santa Fe Trail. Along the way, they escorted emigrants on the Oregon Trail, parleyed with Sioux and Cheyenne, and made geographical sightings. Well planned and well led, the long march proved that mounted troops could move easily and rapidly about the Plains.



## The Mexican War

Dragoons from Fort Scott fought in two important battles during the Mexican War. C Company, stationed here 1842-43, marched with Kearny's Army of the West. At San Pasqual (near San Diego) in late 1846, it met the Mexicans in wild, hand-to-hand fighting. The outcome was mixed for Kearny: he was able to continue his line of march, but among his dead was Benjamin Moore, the fort's first commander. A Company campaigned with Zachary Taylor in northern Mexico. It was present in Feb. 1847 at the hard-fought battle of Buena Vista (right).



Carl Dietz Collection

## 'Bleeding Kansas'

The turbulence from 1855-61 at Fort Scott had its origins in the larger national controversy over slavery. In 1854 Congress opened Kansas and Nebraska territories to white settlement and allowed them to choose by vote whether they would be slave or free. Newcomers of both persuasions flowed in and struggled for political control. Emotions ran high and atrocities were committed on both sides. 'Bleeding Kansas' soon became a byword for the war raging along the border. To quell this turmoil, Federal troops returned to the town of Fort Scott in 1857 and again



in 1858 and quieted down the local civilian unrest. Some of the hostility between rival factions in town is evident in this 1858 woodcut from *Harper's Weekly*; partisan mobs threaten harm at a 'Peace Convention' held at the Western Hotel, a converted infantry barracks.

## The Civil War

The U.S. Army returned to Fort Scott in numbers during the Civil War. The fort served as the headquarters of the Army of the Frontier, a supply depot, a refugee center for displaced Indians, and a base for one of the first Black regiments raised during the war. By 1863 the post quartermaster employed 350 wagons, 400 horses, 2200 mules, and 460 men. Shops, warehouses, stables, and mess halls spread far beyond the original post. The town itself, said a visitor, had 'many well stocked stores, a good hotel, a countless number of beer saloons, a couple dozen billiard ta-



bles, and two or three tin pin alleys....' The 1st Kansas Colored Infantry, mustered here that same year, compiled a proud record. It took part in five engagements and suffered more casualties than any other Kansas regiment.