

Fort Davis

National Historic Site
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES AT FORT DAVIS

Support for the Army

The efficiency of the U. S. Army on the frontier depended not only on the effectiveness of its soldiers, but also on the productiveness and talents of civilian employees.

During the last quarter of the nine-teenth century, the army was the single largest employer in the American Southwest. Most civilians worked for the Quartermaster Department, with a limited number finding employment in the Subsistence and Medical departments.

The largest numbers of civilians were employed as laborers and teamsters. Civilians having special skills such as blacksmiths and carpenters were always in demand. The army provided civilians with a sense of security and a steady paycheck. In return, it acquired a dependable labor force necessary to support its operations.

At Fort Davis the contributions of civilian employees were significant. Along with the enlisted men, civilians constructed and maintained the buildings. They served as

scouts for the soldiers in the field and on campaign. They also worked as clerks, hospital matrons, engineers, laundresses, and wheelwrights. Sometimes they were the only personnel on post with the ability necessary to repair wagons or cut and lay stone. Their wages varied from \$20 to \$125 per month depending on their skills.

Construction of the Second Fort Davis

Shortly after the reestablishment of Fort Davis in June 1867, approximately 200 civilians were hired as carpenters, laborers, plasterers, and stonemasons to work on the new post. One of the first civilians employed was carpenter Edward Hartnett, a twenty-one-year-old native of Ireland. Hartnett earned a very respectable salary of \$75 per month. Hartnett was promoted to foreman in 1870 and his pay increased to \$125 per month. In 1874, his name appeared on the monthly *Report of Persons and Articles Employed and Hired* in the Quartermaster Department as the post's wheelwright in charge of

Ranking Number	No. of Each Class	NAME OF PERSONS and ARTICLES	DESIGNATION AND OCCUPATION	SERVICE DURING THE MONTH			RATE OF HIRE OR COMPENSATION		
				From	To	Days	Dolls	Cents	Days, Month or Voyage
1	1	Jno. L. Kane	Clerk	1	31	31	150	00	Mo.
2	2	D. Heaver	"	1	31	31	125	00	"
3	3	E. S. Thompson	"	1	31	31	125	00	"
4	1	E. Sargent	Vel. Surgeon	1	31	31	100	00	"
5	1	Edw. Hartnett	Foreman	1	31	31	100	00	"
6	2	P. Pearce	Carpenter	1	31	31	75	00	"
7	3	M. Rodgers	"	1	31	31	75	00	"
8	1	H. J. Mc Donald	Wheelwright	1	31	31	75	00	"
9	2	James Summers	"	1	31	31	75	00	"
10	1	M. Reilly	Mason	1	31	31	75	00	"
11	2	N. Biscaino	"	1	31	31	75	00	"
12	3	William Seaton	"	11	31	20	75	00	"
13	4	Francisco Rodriguez	"	11	31	20	75	00	"
14	1	H. Dick	Blacksmith	1	31	31	75	00	"
15	2	A. C. Chail	"	1	31	31	75	00	"
16	1	Sandy Hewing	B. S. Helper	1	31	31	40	00	"
17	1	J. P. Briggs	Painter	1	31	31	75	00	"
18	1	Job Ball	Printer	1	31	31	75	00	"
19	1	A. Mogysemba	Saddler	1	31	31	50	00	"
20	1	A. Shobe	Plasterer	23	31	8	30	00	"
21		Jose Maria Bell	Guide	7	12	6	5	00	day

March 1871 - Report of Persons and Articles Employed and Hired in the Quartermaster Department at Fort Davis, Texas



Edward Hartnett

repairing wagons. When work began on the new post hospital and cavalry stables in the mid-1870s, Hartnett's services as a carpenter were again needed. Edward Hartnett stands alone as having worked more years than any other civilian employed at Fort Davis. Hired on July 3, 1867, he worked until March of 1884 when illness required him to stop.

Civilian Guides and Scouts

Scouts and guides were an indispensable part of the frontier army. They knew the terrain of an area well. They could locate water sources at anytime of the year and were familiar with the shortest and easiest trails from one place to another. Scouts often had the added skill of identifying by tribe the Indians they were pursuing.

The tracking skills of a good scout included the ability to approximate numbers, to estimate how far ahead those being trailed were, and to determine whether the party included women and children. Following the Civil War, the U. S. Army employed José María Bill as a guide, expressman, and scout at a number of frontier posts in Texas. Bill is listed on the rolls at Fort Davis from 1868 until 1872. Often the only guide or scout employed, he earned anywhere from \$50 to \$100 per month.

According to a great-grandson, Indians held Bill captive at an early age, presumably in central or eastern Texas. As a young man he found his way to west Texas. Regarded as an extremely competent guide, José María Bill had a keen knowledge of the ways of the Apaches and Comanches.

Teamsters and Wagonmasters

In addition to issuing contracts for hauling subsistence and quartermaster supplies, the military also provided some of its own transportation. It would often haul water, hay, fuel, and other supplies to army camps and sub-posts, as well as accompany troops on campaign. For this it employed civilian teamsters and wagonmasters.

Sixteen-year-old James A. Shannon first came to Fort Davis in 1867 as a civilian employee of the Quartermaster Department in San Antonio. He was one of a number of civilians employed to move the Ninth U. S. Cavalry to Fort Davis when the post was reestablished after the Civil War.

In September of 1880, Shannon's name first appeared on the rolls of civilian employees at Fort Davis. He was listed as a tinner, having been employed to put a tin roof on one of the cavalry stables.

Shannon worked at Fort Davis through November of 1888. During these years he was employed not only as a tinner, but also as a teamster, trainmaster, foragemaster, blacksmith, wagonmaster, and wheelwright, earning from \$30 to \$75 per month.



James Shannon

Shannon was just one of many civilians employed as teamsters at Fort Davis. Robert Mulhern, a son of Ordnance Sergeant Charles Mulhern, found employment at the post in 1880. For the next five years he worked both as a teamster and blacksmith and was paid the standard \$1 per day.

Ex-Soldier Employees

In the records of Fort Davis, a number of discharged soldiers seeking to remain in the area found employment at the post. Among these were George Bentley and Darby Ford.

George Bentley came to Fort Davis in April of 1868 with Company K of the Ninth U. S. Cavalry. According to family tradition, he served as a baker during part of the time he was stationed here.



George Bentley

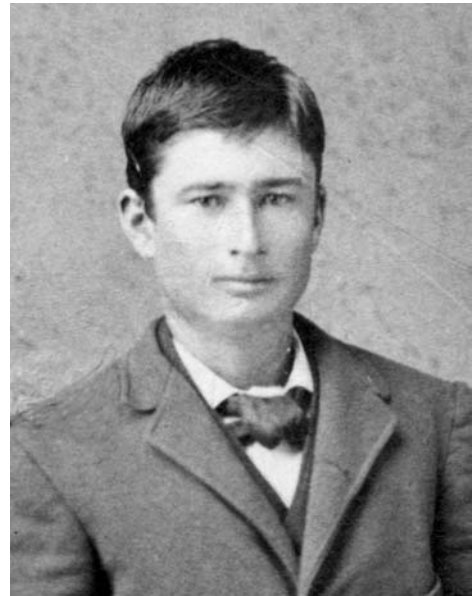
In May 1871, Bentley's company was transferred to Fort Quitman but that December, when his enlistment was up, he returned to Fort Davis to settle. During the 1870s, he worked as a packer and teamster for the Quarter-master Department.

In 1886, Company K of the Fifth U. S. Infantry transferred to Fort Davis. One of the privates in the company was Darby Ford, who was discharged at Fort Davis on October 26, 1888.

Five days after being discharged, Ford was employed as the engineer at the post's waterworks. His pay was \$60 a month – quite a substantial increase from the base pay of \$13 per month he earned as a private. Ford continued to work as a civilian employee at Fort Davis until May 31, 1891.

Other Civilian Employees

Countless civilians were employed at Fort Davis during the period it was an active military post. Some worked just on special projects or during periods of extensive building. Others remained on the rolls for years, working in a number of different positions as the need arose.



Robert Mulhern

In 1881, John Mulhern (the stepson of Ordnance Sergeant Charles Mulhern) was employed as a foragemaster earning \$75 a month. In 1883, he worked as both a teamster and an auctioneer in charge of selling condemned cavalry horses.

Robert Grierson, son of post commander Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson (1882-1885) worked as a foragemaster in 1883.

Hospital Matrons

A number of wives of hospital stewards were employed as hospital matrons. They included Vivianetta Williamson in 1879-1880; Rachael Dare in 1886-1887; and Sarah Haven and Addie Appel in 1887.

It is believed that Private Anton Aggerman, who after his discharge from the army settled in Fort Davis, met his future wife when he was detailed to the post hospital as a cook in the mid-1880s. The Medical Department had employed the future Mrs. Aggerman – Barbara Millan, and her mother Carmella, as hospital matrons in the 1880s.

A Needed Source of Labor

The frontier army depended heavily upon civilians as a source of skilled and unskilled labor. The employees referenced in this brochure are but a handful of those who worked at Fort Davis during the last half of the nineteenth century. Many of their descendants, along with the descendants of other civilian workers, still reside in Fort Davis and in the Trans-Pecos area.