

Guide to the Buildings and Ruins

Fort Davis National Historic Site



601.
Fort Davis Texas
Genl. View from N

INTRODUCTION

This guide has been developed to further help you enjoy and understand the significance of Fort Davis. There is no set way to tour the area. Simply match an existing building or ruin with the centerfold map and read the corresponding numbered information.

1-13 These adobe and stone houses, known as Officers' Row, made life on the harsh Texas frontier relatively comfortable for officers and their families. The thick walls were good insulation against summer's heat and helped to maintain comfortable temperatures during the brief winter. Officers' Row was constructed over a period of years; often junior officers had to share quarters due to a lack of housing.

7 The large house in the center of the row was reserved for the post commander. It is refurnished to the period when Colonel B. H. Grierson and his family occupied it, 1882-1885.

a Kitchens, as a matter of style, were built separate from the quarters. These kept the main houses cooler in the summer by confining the hot cooking operation to another building. These structures also provided housing for servants. Even though an officer was not particularly well paid, his social status dictated that he have at least one servant to do the cooking. Sometimes servants were soldiers, called "strickers," but more often were single women.

The kitchen and servant's quarters behind officer's quarters No. 12 has been restored and is refurnished.

17 Site of an unexcavated structure referred to on most reports as an "Officers and NCO's Quarters." A number of buildings in this general area housed married enlisted men. The structural remains skirt cemetery trail.

14, 15, Spacious two-story houses were built during the mid-1880s, each to accommodate junior officers, many of whom were bachelors. Designed to be shared quarters, they were sometimes occupied by non-commissioned staff officers when space permitted. Commissary Sergeant Thomas Forsyth, and his

16, 18

large family, known as “The Tribe,” lived in No. 15 in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

19 During the 1870s, this small structure served as the Ordnance Sergeant’s Quarters and Signal Office. In the early 1880s, chief musician George Brunner lived here. Sergeant Brunner was a close friend of the Grierson family. The Grierson boys spent many enjoyable hours visiting the sergeant and playing musical instruments.

20-23 The Barracks were home for the enlisted men. Soldiers, however, spent little time in the barracks during daylight hours. Reveille, which sounded

25-27 around 6 A.M., signaled the men to be out of their bunks for morning roll call. The men were kept busy for the remainder of the day with work details, drill, target practice, and guard duty. Such a life quickly grew monotonous. It was challenging for officers to keep their men from entertaining thoughts of desertion.

The north wing of enlisted men’s barracks No. 21, housing the orderly room and a squad room, is refurnished to the summer of 1884 when Troop H of the Tenth U.S. Cavalry occupied it.

b Sinks (latrines) were a constant source of filth and disease. During the 1870s and ‘80s, however, doctors were just beginning to connect certain illnesses with unsanitary conditions.

24 Band Barracks — Each regiment had a band of about two dozen members. These soldiers were sometimes specifically enlisted for their musical talents. This did not exempt them from the regular duties that all other soldiers performed, except that some drills were replaced by band practice. Their pay was the same as the privates of line companies — \$13 a month.

28 The versatile Post Chapel was the fort’s social center. Here the garrison and local citizens attended church, dances, and theatricals. On weekdays the chaplain, or an assigned enlisted man, taught school for army children. Classes for soldiers were held in the evenings. The Chapel also housed the post library

where officers and enlisted men alike could read the latest newspapers or check out books.

29 Post Headquarters, containing offices for the commanding officer, adjutant, and sergeant major, was the hub of military bureaucracy at Fort Davis. The staff processed countless letters, orders, and reports – and without electricity or typewriters, the soldier-clerk wrote them all in duplicate, by hand!

30 The Guardhouse, or “mill” in soldier slang, was the epitome of the army’s strict discipline and harsh punishment for errant soldiers. Built of adobe with a shingle roof, the guardhouse contained eight cells, a prison room, guardroom, room of the officer of the guard, and a storeroom. The latter was eliminated in the late 1880s to give the officer of the guard more space.

The remote frontier environment produced boredom among the men for which drunkenness, fighting, and insubordination were common outlets. Average sentences were: ten to thirty days at hard labor; solitary confinement for up to eight days; or in extreme cases, dishonorable discharge with a federal prison sentence.

Although the Guardhouse is usually thought of as a jail, it also served as the fort’s fire station. In an age of wood-burning stoves and oil lamps, fire was a greater threat to Fort Davis than raiding Indians. Sentries were ever watchful for fires, while the remainder of the guard detail was prepared for immediate response to an alarm. If fire broke out, the entire garrison turned out with buckets, ladders, and axes according to a prearranged plan.

31 Bakery – Fresh bread was an important staple in the army ration. Each soldier was entitled to one 18-oz. loaf daily. Because of the isolated location, the only feasible way to supply bread was to make it here at the bakery. Soldiers assigned as bakers often possessed little knowledge of the job and heartily disliked such hard and “unsoldierly” duty. Bad bread was often the result.

32 Old Subsistence Storehouse – Supplying food to perhaps 500 or more people at Fort Davis was a complicated operation. Nearly everything had to be freighted by wagon from San Antonio. Anticipating the all too frequent delays because of

weather, swollen streams, attacks by bandits and raiding Apache and Comanche Indians, the commissary officer attempted to reserve at least four to six months' supply in this storehouse.

Upon completion of a new commissary storehouse (No. 37) in the mid-1880s, this building was used as a forage house and later an ordnance storehouse.

33 Commissary Office — This building originally served as the bakery. In the early 1880s it was used as a salesroom and office for the Acting Commissary of Subsistence—the officer who had charge of the commissary. The Subsistence Department records were maintained here.

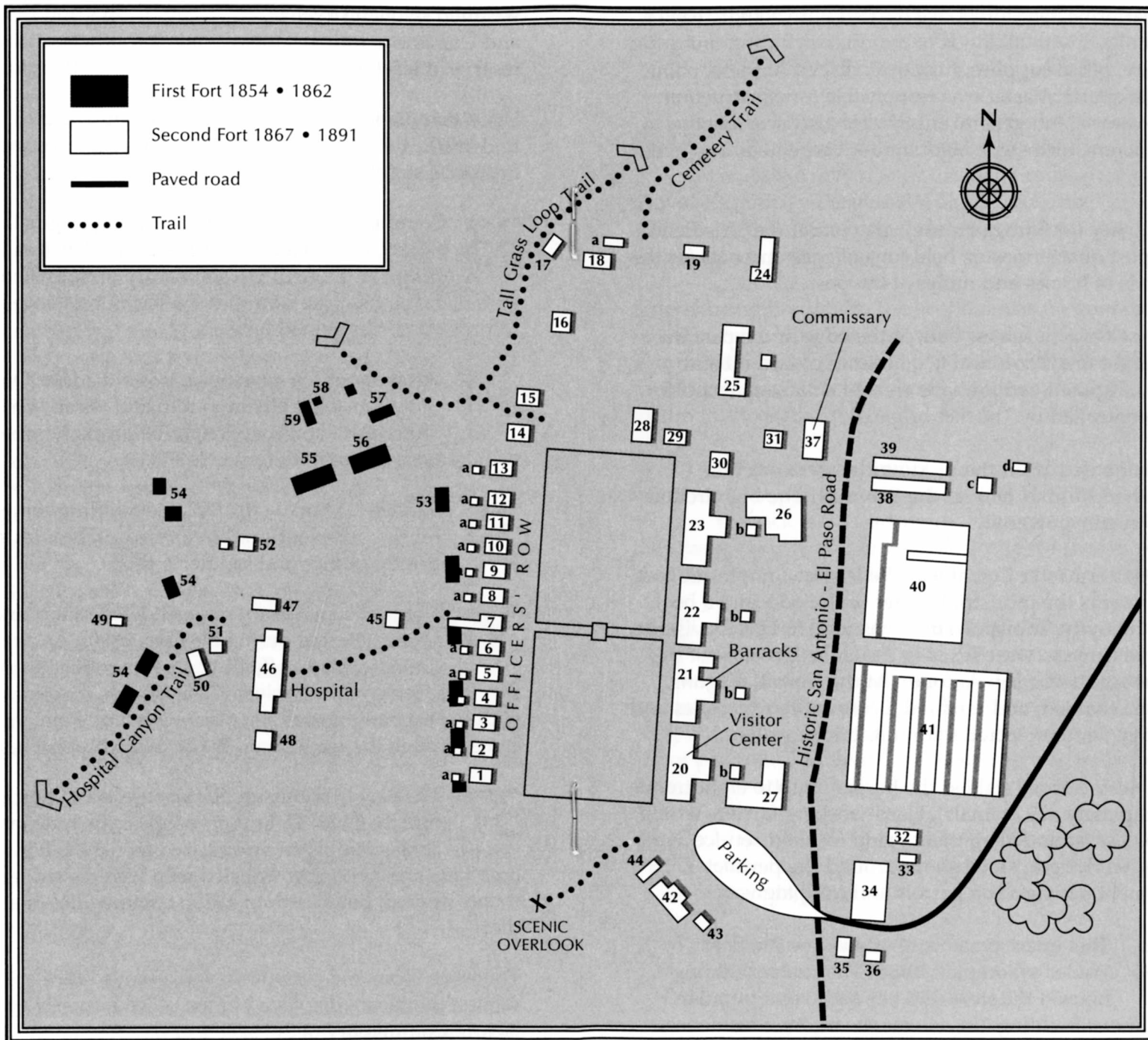
34 After about ten years' use, this old adobe Quartermaster Storehouse fell victim to rain and wind. When the supplies stored here could no longer be properly protected a new warehouse was built. (Refer to No. 38.)

35 Saddler's Shop — In 1882 this building served as quarters for the post quartermaster sergeant, besides serving as a printing office and saddler's shop.

36 The post commissary sergeant lived in this uncomfortable adobe building during the early 1880s. As a ranking non-commissioned staff officer, he was entitled to private quarters. But, these were not so "private." Tarantulas, scorpions, and other native inhabitants shared the place with him. Rain and dust, as well, came through the cracks until the building became uninhabitable.

37 The new Commissary Storehouse was a much larger structure than No. 32, but served the same function. Officers and civilian employees purchased foodstuffs here at government cost, plus transportation. Enlisted men were issued rations but could, if they desired, purchase non-ration commodities to enhance their diet.

The issue room and commissary sergeant's office are refurnished, while exhibits are displayed in the office formerly occupied by the Acting Commissary of Subsistence.



38 The Quartermaster Storehouse bustled with activity each day. It bulged with all kinds of material including uniforms, hardware, office supplies, furniture, dishes, harness, paint, and lumber. The quartermaster was responsible for construction projects, maintenance, and general supply. He also oversaw the employees—laborers, teamsters, blacksmiths, carpenters, and even a plumber!

39 The Granary (or Forage House), also under the jurisdiction of the post quartermaster, held tons of corn and oats for the hundreds of horses and mules at the post.

C The Oil or Coal House was built at the edge of the post in case it caught fire. The sizeable quantities of lard oil and kerosene, if ignited, would have created a blaze that could not have been controlled by “bucket brigades.”

d Pine logs, hauled from the mountains, were cut into dimensioned lumber here at the Sawmill. The big circular saw was steam-powered.

40 The Quartermaster Corral was the largest complex at Fort Davis. It was the industrial center of the post and a beehive of activity. Transportation was vital to Fort Davis and until the railroad came to west Texas in the early 1880s, most supplies came by wagon from San Antonio. At the Corral, wagons were housed, maintained, and repaired. Scores of hardy mules and mountains of hay were protected within its adobe walls.

41 The Cavalry Corrals stabled the horses of up to eight troops (approximately 475 animals). Hard-working farriers would shoe the horses and keep them ready for field service at all times. Saddlers, working in small shops around the perimeter, repaired equipment damaged on patrols and campaigns.

42-44 This unexcavated site was where the Post Trader’s Complex stood. The center building housed the store and bar and was a popular hangout for soldiers. Building No. 44 was the trader’s residence, while No. 43 served as the telegraph office for many years.

45 The post commander, in his lofty position, had this stable set aside for his exclusive use. Other officers were obliged to keep their horses in the troop stables.

46 This twenty-four bed Post Hospital provided up-to-date care for the sick and injured. As the army surgeon was often the only doctor for many miles, he treated civilians as well as military personnel. His staff consisted of a hospital steward, two or three nurses, a cook assigned from the ranks of the enlisted men, and a matron.

Simply being brought to the hospital was no guarantee that one might survive. Surgery was performed right in the wards with only a portable screen to mask the operation from the other patients. Little was known about internal injuries and many patients fell victim to shock and infection.

47 The Hospital Storehouse contained all of the reserve medical supplies. On one occasion, Hospital Steward F.W. Wearick was court-martialed when he could not explain the disappearance of a number of bottles of medicinal alcohol. The trial revealed that he had drunk them!

48 Hospital Steward's Quarters — The duties of the steward, one of the highest paid non-commissioned officers, included preparing and dispensing medication, record keeping, and supervising nurses and cooks. He was not a trained medical man, but often rose to the challenge. For example, in coming to the aid of patients with dental problems, he was frequently called upon to extract teeth.

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

50 Hospital Laundry — Strong-armed laundresses labored here over boilers and tubs to wash soiled and contaminated linens from the hospital.

51 Woodhouse — The hospital required a large reserve of firewood both for the comfort of the patients and for cooking. The shed that once stood here insured that the wood remained dry at all times.

52 Hospital Privy (Latrine).

53 These foundations mark the sites of enlisted men's barracks of the first Fort Davis (1854-1862). When the fort was re-established in 1867, the rubble was cleaned away and new officers' quarters were laid directly over portions of these footings.

54 Sites of Officers' Quarters 1854-1862 — Officers shared the harsh living conditions of their men while quartered in these crude huts made of pine slabs with thatched roofs.

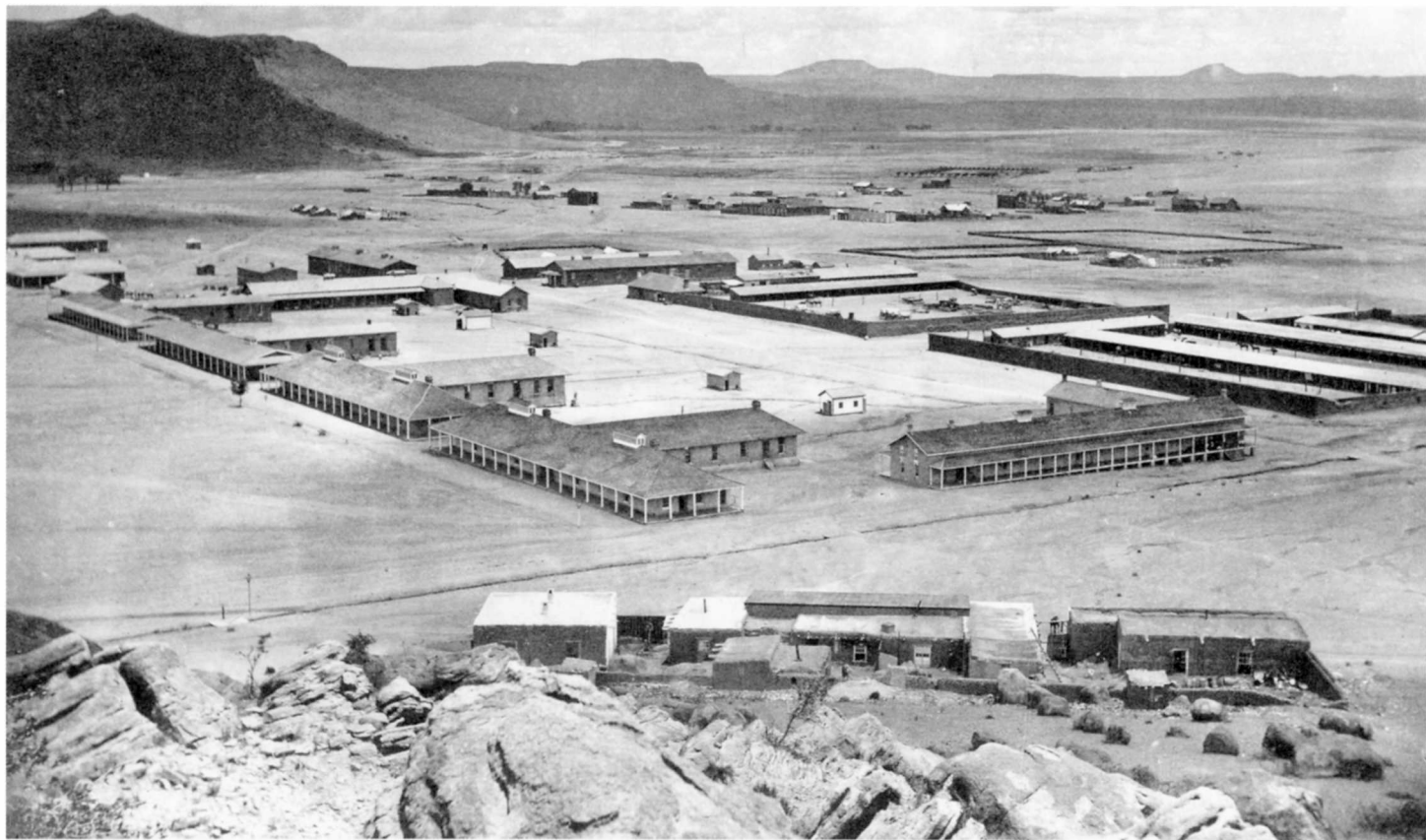
55 Combination Quartermaster and Commissary Storehouse built between 1857 and 1859. Originally two stories high and having a shingle roof, this building furnished storage for a wide variety of clothing, equipment, food, and other supplies.

56 Sutler's Store and Residence — The sutler provided commercial foods, liquor, and other simple luxuries for the soldiers. The burned stakes represent remains of the building after its destruction by Apaches following abandonment of the fort in 1862.

57 Unidentified structure used during both first and second fort occupancies. Probably a quarters for one or two regimental non-commissioned officers.

58 This is thought to be the site of the post's first Blacksmith Shop, 1855-1859.

59 First Fort Davis Bakery — In the late 1850s, an outdoor stone oven supplemented the one inside the building. Inspector General Mansfield reported in 1860 that bread produced in this bakery was of "indifferent" quality.



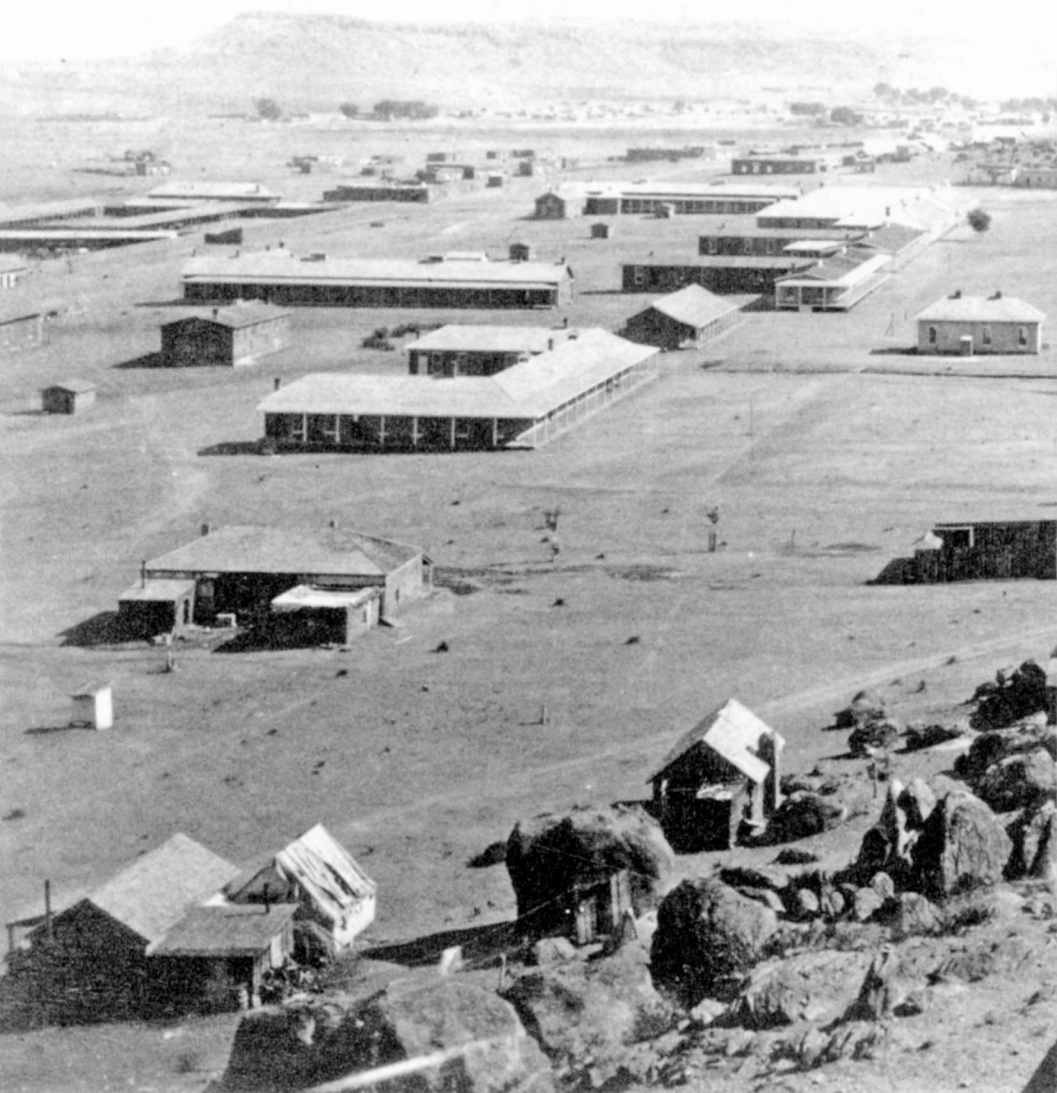
Circa 1887. Post Trader's Complex, Enlisted Men's Barracks, Cavalry Stables, Quartermaster Corral

This publication was produced with funds donated by
Western National Parks Association.

www.wnpa.org

 Printed on recycled paper

7/2010



This publication was produced with funds donated by
Western National Parks Association.

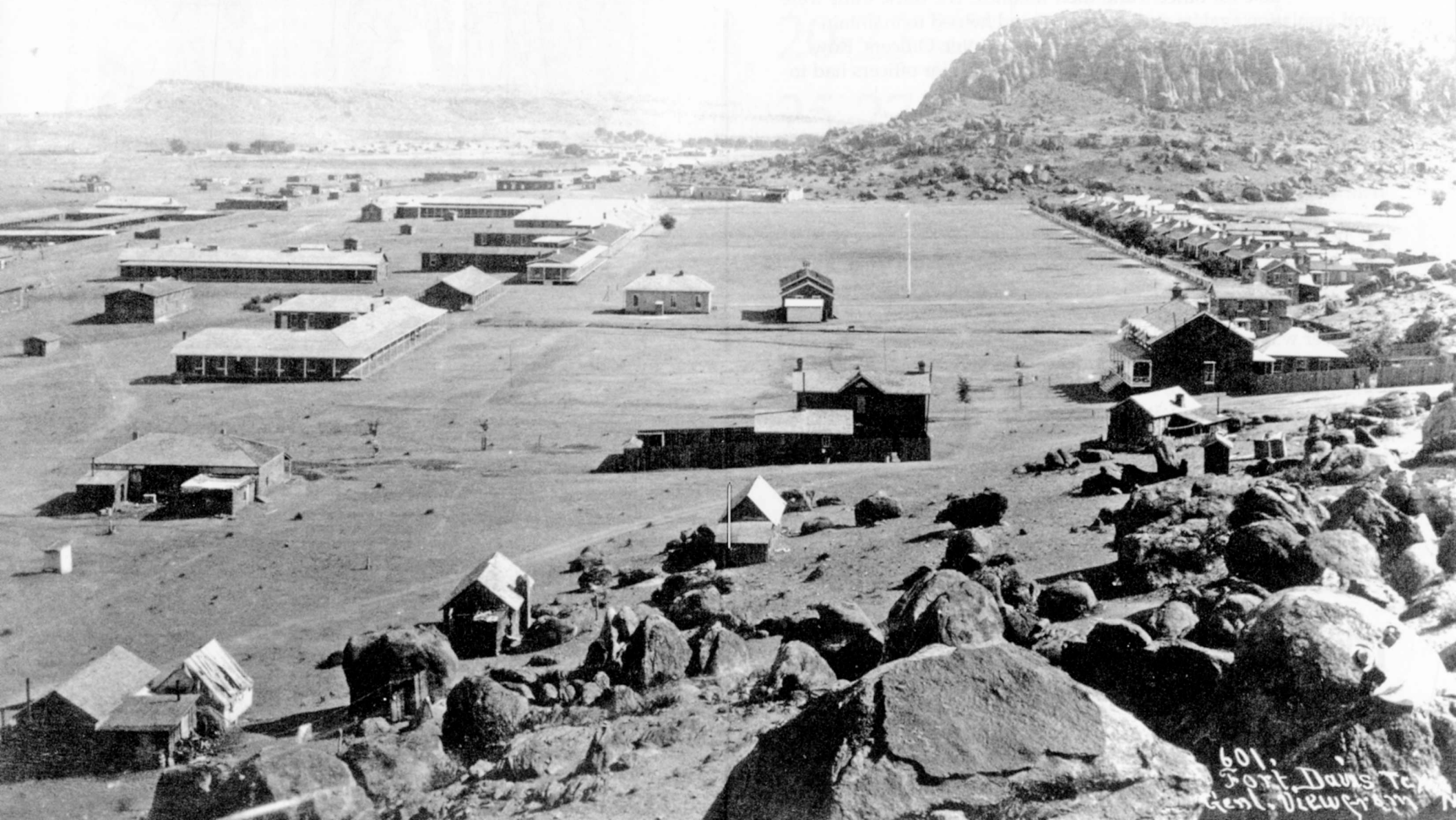
www.wnpa.org

 Printed on recycled paper

7/2010

Guide to the Buildings and Ruins

Fort Davis National Historic Site



601.
Fort Davis Texas
Genl. View from N