

Fort Scott

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Historic Site
Kansas





The Story of Fort Scott is the story of America growing up. When the fort was established in 1842, the nation was still young and confined largely to the area east of the Mississippi River. Yet within a few years, Fort Scott's soldiers became involved in events that would lead to tremendous spurts of growth and expansion. As the nation developed, tensions over slavery led to the conflict and turmoil of "Bleeding Kansas" and the Civil War. Fort Scott's story takes you through these years of crisis and beyond to the time when the United States emerged as a united, transcontinental nation.

A Permanent Indian Frontier



As a young America grew, settlers hungry for land forced American Indians west of the Mississippi. When they arrived in this area, tribes were guaranteed land where white settlement would be forbidden. Established in 1842, Fort Scott served as one of a line of forts from Minnesota to Louisiana that helped to enforce this promise of a "permanent Indian frontier." Soldiers kept peace between white settlers, native peoples like the Osage, and relocated Eastern tribes.

Positioned on a bluff surrounded by prairie and rolling hills, Fort Scott (named for Gen. Winfield Scott) filled a gap between Fort Leavenworth to the north and Fort Gibson, 150 miles south. The fort was home to infantry soldiers and dragoons, elite troops trained to fight both on horseback and on foot. The infantry performed many of the fatigue duties, including fort maintenance, while the dragoons went on numerous expeditions.

In the 1840s, settlers flocked westward to Oregon and California. Conflict arose along the Santa Fe and Oregon trails: dragoons were called on to keep the peace. Two expeditions



La Soldat du Chene, an Osage chief.

• Louisiana Purchase

• Lewis and Clark Expedition



Swiss artist Karl Bodmer painted this family of displaced Indians in 1833. JOSLYN ART MUSEUM

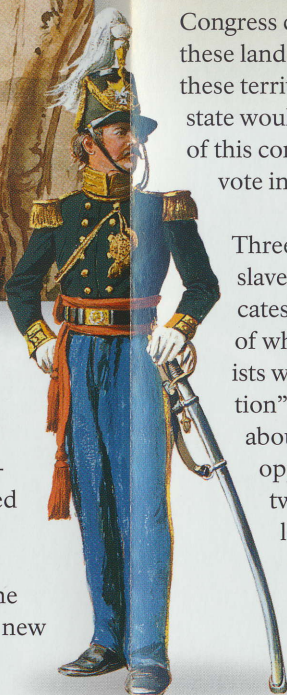
Left: Hiero T. Wilson, longtime fort sutler (storekeeper) and one of the founders and leaders of the town of Fort Scott.

KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

rode escort on the Santa Fe Trail in 1843. In 1844 and 1845, dragoons parleyed with Indian tribes that threatened settlers along the Oregon Trail. They also patrolled the Oregon Trail as far west as South Pass.

Both infantry and dragoons left Fort Scott to fight in the Mexican-American War (1846–48), which brought vast new lands into U.S. possession. Some Fort Scott dragoons served in New Mexico and California, while others fought at Buena Vista. Infantry soldiers from Fort Scott participated in Winfield Scott's overland march to Mexico City.

Westward expansion in the 1840s nearly doubled the country's size and fulfilled "Manifest Destiny"—the idea that it was America's divine right to stretch from coast to coast. As the frontier extended farther westward, the idea of a "permanent" Indian territory died a quick death and the army abandoned Fort Scott in 1853. However, violent events in the region would soon bring soldiers back as the nation experienced growing pains over the issue of slavery.



Dragoon officer
NPS/DON TROIANI

Bleeding Kansas

Slavery divided the nation during its turbulent adolescent years. Conflict arose over whether to allow slavery in the new western territories. Under the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), Congress created Kansas and Nebraska territories, opening these lands for settlement. It declared that the residents of these territories could decide by popular vote whether their state would be free or slave. In Kansas, people on both sides of this controversial issue flooded in, trying to influence the vote in their favor.

Three distinct political groups occupied Kansas—proslaverys, free-staters, and abolitionists. Proslavery advocates, as the name implies, supported slavery, regardless of whether they personally owned slaves. Abolitionists wanted to rid the nation of the "peculiar institution" altogether. Free-staters didn't particularly care about slavery where it already existed, but were opposed to its extension westward. Conflict between these opposing factions soon turned violent. As a result, this era became forever known as "Bleeding Kansas," an era when violence, destruction, and psychological warfare prevailed in the region.

Fort Scott and the surrounding area were not immune from the turmoil. Sold at auction in 1855, the fort buildings became the new town of Fort Scott. The townspeople were primarily proslavery, while free-staters and abolitionists dominated the surrounding countryside. This division of opposing factions was illustrated on the grounds of the "old fort" by the existence of two hotels. One, a former officers' quarters, became the Fort Scott Hotel, nicknamed the "Free State" Hotel due to the political leanings of many of its guests. Directly across the square, an infantry barracks was now the Western Hotel, a headquarters for proslavery men.



James Montgomery
KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Missouri Compromise

1st Wagon Use of Santa Fe Trail

Bureau of Indian Affairs
Established

Indian Removal Act

John L. O'Sullivan Articulates Man

Frontier Military
Road Authorized

Eastern Tribes Relocated

1820

1830

1840



John Steuart Curry's mural "Tragic Prelude" made John Brown the symbolic central figure in the clash of forces in Bleeding Kansas. *Left:* Detail from "Guerrillas" by Andy Thomas.

©ANDY THOMAS/MAZE CREEK STUDIO



By 1858, radical elements from both factions converged on the area. James Montgomery, an ardent abolitionist, became a leader of free-state forces that invaded Fort Scott, a haven for Border Ruffians (extreme proslavery men). During one raid, Montgomery tried to burn the Western Hotel; another raid took the life of John Little, a former deputy marshal.

During this era, soldiers returned periodically to Fort Scott to restore law and order, staying each time until violence abated, only to have conflict resume on their departure. By the time the territorial strife waned in 1859, nearly 60 people had died and hundreds were terrorized throughout Kansas in the struggle over slavery. Antislavery forces finally prevailed. Kansas entered the Union as a free state on January 29, 1861, but by then the fighting and violence, once contained to this area, threatened to engulf the entire country.

Civil War

The struggles of an adolescent America became a full-fledged rebellion in 1861 as the issues of slavery and self-determination drove the nation apart. The war brought the U.S. Army back to Fort Scott. Union commanders viewed the town as a strategic point in southeast Kansas to establish a base of military operations, where the army could protect Kansas against a possible Confederate invasion. Troops reoccupied many of the old fort buildings, including the stables and hospital, and began constructing a variety of new buildings and over 40 miles of fortifications.



Above: A 1st Kansas volunteer is depicted here in Dean Mitchell's painting, "Fort Scott Soldier." ©DEAN MITCHELL
Confederate Gen. Sterling Price's 1864 defeat at the Battle of Mine Creek (below) forced him to abandon plans to attack Fort Scott.



Indian recruits being sworn in for Civil War duty.



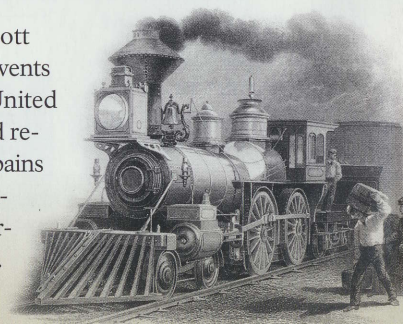
fying its ranks. American Indian and African American regiments were recruited in the area, including the 1st Kansas Colored Infantry. Sworn in on the grounds of Fort Scott, this was one of the first African American regiments to engage the Confederates in combat.

Fort Scott's military stores made it a target of Confederate Gen. Sterling Price, who made two unsuccessful attempts to capture it during the war. Guerilla warfare, which plagued the region, also threatened the town. Intense fighting on the Kansas-Missouri border between pro-Union Jayhawkers and pro-Confederate Bushwhackers kept the military occupied. The Union presence likely spared Fort Scott the pillaging and destruction suffered by other towns.

Railroad Expansion

After the Civil War ended in 1865, the nation began to heal and to unify. Railroads built across the continent played a major role in tying the country together. Fort Scott's town leaders saw a railroad line as a means to build prosperity by tapping into the trade of Eastern markets. By 1869, their efforts succeeded as the first railroad reached the city. As workers laid tracks south of town, they came into conflict with squatters who forcefully opposed the railroad. The military returned and established the Post of Southeast Kansas (1869–73) to protect the railroad workers. This set the stage for a rare instance when U.S. troops took up arms against American citizens to protect the country's business interests.

From 1842 to 1873, Fort Scott played a significant role in events that helped transform the United States from a young divided republic through the growing pains of conflict and war into maturity as a united and powerful transcontinental nation.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Manifest Destiny

1st Use of Oregon Trail by Emigrant Wagon Train

Fort Scott Established

U.S.-Mexican War

1850

Fort Scott Closed

Military Sells Fort Buildings
Town Begins

Bleeding Kansas

1860

Lincoln Elected President

Kansas Becomes 34th State

Fort Scott Re-Established

1st Kansas Colored Infantry

U.S. Civil War

Fort Scott Closed

1st Transcontinental Railway

Post of Southeast Kansas Established

Reconstruction

1870

Post of Southeast Kansas Closed

1880

Life at a Frontier Outpost

Soldier life at Fort Scott in the 1840s was one of boredom and monotony. Outside contacts were few and came mostly from Indians, travelers on the military road, and missionaries and traders on Indian lands. Social contacts were confined mostly to the post. Daily activities ranged from guard and fatigue duties to roll calls and drills. Periodic expeditions to patrol trails, escort wagon trains, and meet with Indians alleviated the routine.



Officers' Row 1873

The soldiers lived in tents and log huts until permanent quarters

were completed. Food was shipped by wagon from Fort Leavenworth, over 100 miles away, and consisted mostly of salt pork, salt beef, rice, and beans. Fresh vegetables from fort gardens supplemented this. Items not supplied by the military could be purchased from the post sutler.

While illness and injury were constant threats to Fort Scott's soldiers, combat was not. Nobody was killed in battle while stationed here. Work was rigorous during the years of construction, but once the post was built little was demanded of the garrison except general maintenance. All in all, Fort Scott had relatively good food and comfortable quarters, and the health of the soldiers was good.



Post hospital during the Civil War



ALL IMAGES NPS



Fort Scott Today



Follow this map for a close look at the fort today. Open doors and exhibit signs indicate displays. Inquire about accessibility at the visitor center. Buildings open to the public are briefly described below.

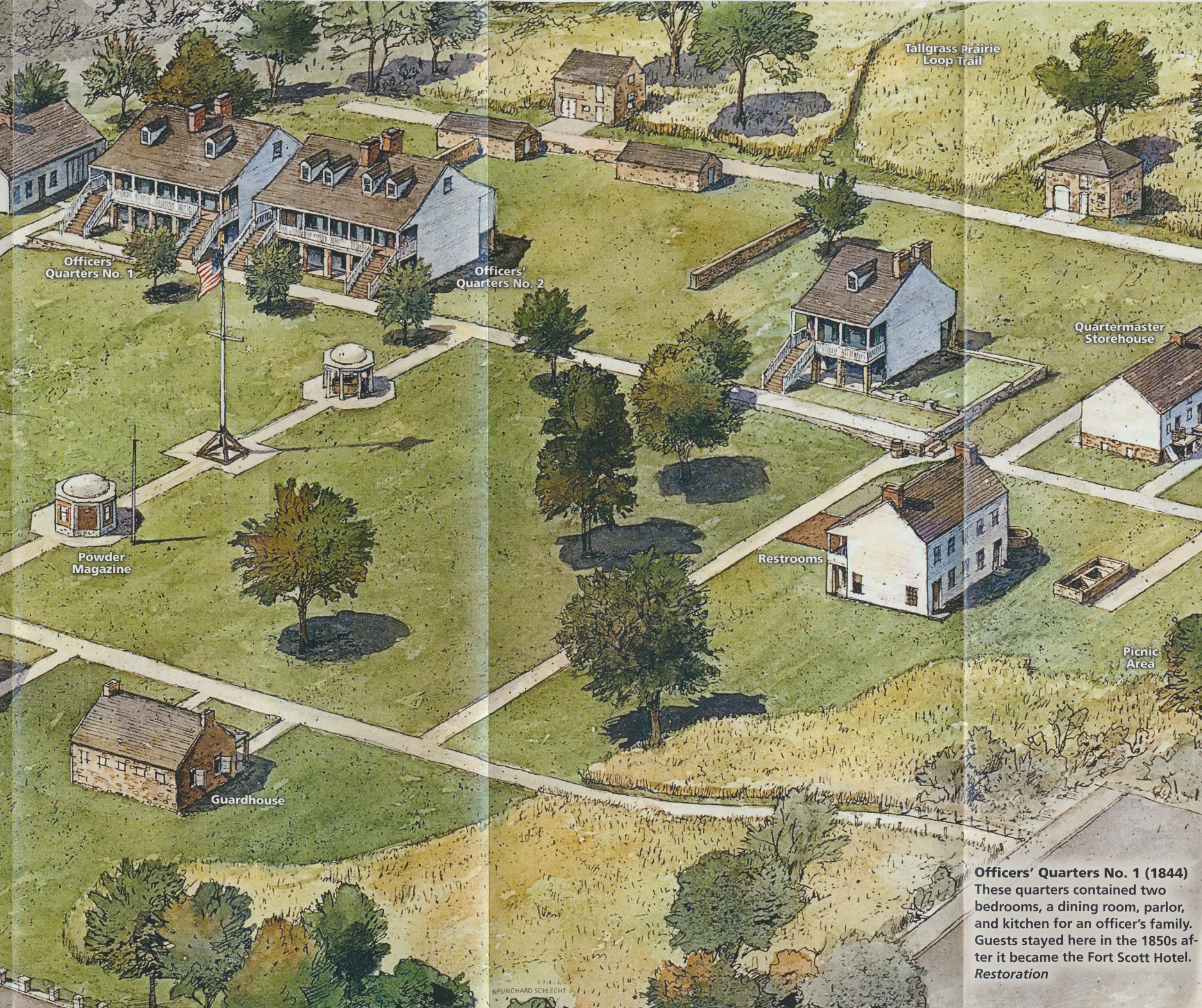
Hospital (1843) Surgeons treated sick and wounded soldiers here during the 1840s and in the Civil War. It now houses a visitor center and bookstore. An upstairs ward is refurnished. *Restoration*

Infantry Barracks (1844) Home to infantry soldiers, this became the Western Hotel in the 1850s, a proslavery headquarters. The present building contains a museum and a film. *Reconstruction*

Dragoon Stables (1843) Eighty horses with their feed, tack, and hay could be sheltered here. Later it served as a Civil War storehouse for up to a million rations. *Reconstruction*

Dragoon Barracks (1844) Dragoon soldiers slept on the second floor and ate in the mess hall on the first floor. During Bleeding Kansas, it housed a land office and courtroom. *Reconstruction*

Post Headquarters (1848) In this building's offices, the fort's commander oversaw post operations and convened courts martial. In 1858, a man was killed here while it operated as a general store. *Reconstruction*



Officers'
Quarters No. 1

Officers'
Quarters No. 2

Powder
Magazine

Guardhouse

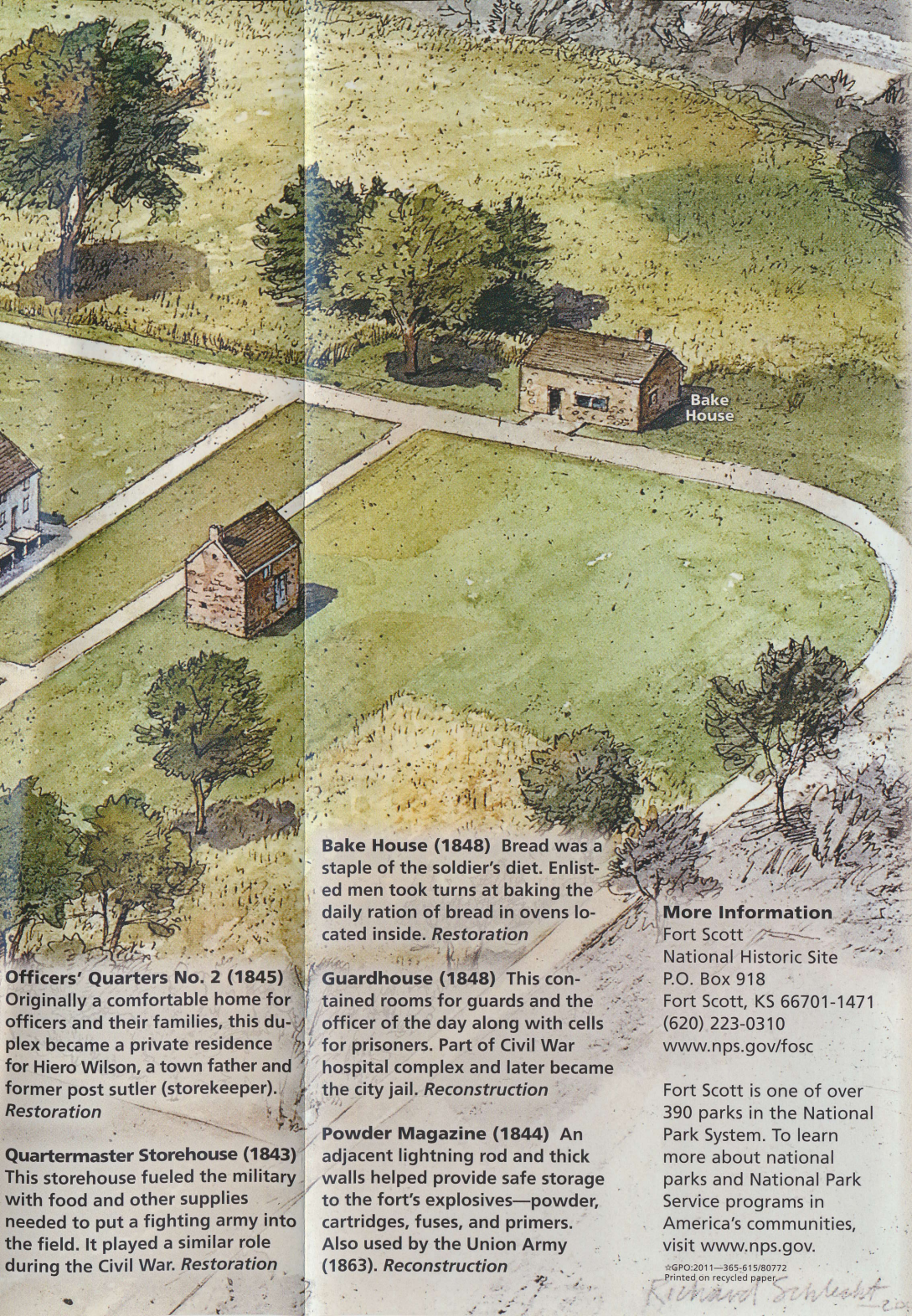
Restrooms

Quartermaster
Storehouse

Picnic
Area

Tallgrass Prairie
Loop Trail

Officers' Quarters No. 1 (1844)
These quarters contained two bedrooms, a dining room, parlor, and kitchen for an officer's family. Guests stayed here in the 1850s after it became the Fort Scott Hotel.
Restoration



Officers' Quarters No. 2 (1845) Originally a comfortable home for officers and their families, this duplex became a private residence for Hiero Wilson, a town father and former post sutler (storekeeper). *Restoration*

Quartermaster Storehouse (1843) This storehouse fueled the military with food and other supplies needed to put a fighting army into the field. It played a similar role during the Civil War. *Restoration*

Bake House (1848) Bread was a staple of the soldier's diet. Enlisted men took turns at baking the daily ration of bread in ovens located inside. *Restoration*

Guardhouse (1848) This contained rooms for guards and the officer of the day along with cells for prisoners. Part of Civil War hospital complex and later became the city jail. *Reconstruction*

Powder Magazine (1844) An adjacent lightning rod and thick walls helped provide safe storage to the fort's explosives—powder, cartridges, fuses, and primers. Also used by the Union Army (1863). *Reconstruction*

More Information

Fort Scott
National Historic Site
P.O. Box 918
Fort Scott, KS 66701-1471
(620) 223-0310
www.nps.gov/fosc

Fort Scott is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

©GPO:2011—365-615/80772
Printed on recycled paper

Richard Schlecht

From Frontier Fort to National Historic Site

From 1842 to 1873, the buildings of Fort Scott stood witness to epic events that helped shape the country. In the years after the army left, the city of Fort Scott thrived and expanded. The old fort buildings continued to serve as residences and commercial properties for many years. Eventually some were destroyed by fire, while others were torn down for new structures.

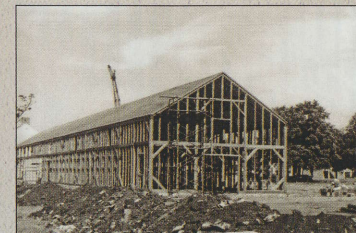


Town of Fort Scott, Kan., late 1860s

In the 1950s a group of Fort Scott's history-minded citizens, proud of their town's military origins, argued for restoring the fort to its late 1840s appearance to attract visitors and commemorate its nationally significant story.

Federal funding paved the way for the fort's rebirth. Archaeological investigations determined the location of missing buildings. Structures not original were torn down, while most historic buildings and features were restored or reconstructed. In 1978 it became a national historic site. Today, Fort Scott's buildings endure as memorials to the legacy of a young and vibrant America.

For your safety: Use caution on uneven walkways and use the handrail on steep stairs. Steps may be hazardous, especially during wet weather. Seek shelter in buildings during thunderstorms. Climbing on walls, wagons, cannon, and other features may cause serious injury.



Dagoon stables under reconstruction

Keep a safe distance from horses. Smoking is not permitted in fort buildings or near the tall-grass prairie.