



Foundation Document Overview

Fort Scott National Historic Site

Kansas



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of Fort Scott National Historic Site is to preserve, commemorate, and interpret for present and future generations Fort Scott and its role in a sequence of pivotal events that transformed the nation—the Permanent Indian Frontier, the opening of the West, Bleeding Kansas, and the Civil War.



Significance

Significance statements express why Fort Scott National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Fort Scott National Historic Site is the most complete example of a US Army fort from the Permanent Indian Frontier, featuring original and reconstructed buildings and structures, furnished rooms, historic landscape features, archeological resources, and museum collections.
- Fort Scott National Historic Site is an outstanding place to interpret the country's Indian policy in the 1840s and 1850s. The fort was established to enforce the government's promise of a permanent Indian territory and to keep the peace among relocated tribes, local tribes, and Missouri settlers. As an important link in a network of forts, Fort Scott served a critical role in the protection of the Permanent Indian Frontier from its establishment in 1842 to its closure in 1853.
- Because of the variety of military missions in which Fort Scott soldiers participated, the national historic site is an exceptional place to interpret the US Army's role in the opening of the West: a role that hastened the demise of the Permanent Indian Frontier.
- In the late 1850s, Fort Scott was the scene of violence and unrest that embodied the period known as Bleeding Kansas—the civil strife over slavery in the Kansas Territory that riveted the nation and helped ignite the Civil War.
- During the Civil War, the town of Fort Scott served as the command post for a diverse group of Union soldiers, including a large concentration of American Indian and African American soldiers. The First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry, which joined the Union Army at Fort Scott, was the first African American regiment from a northern state and the first to engage and defeat pro-Confederate forces in battle.
- Due to its strategic location, the town of Fort Scott became a major military center that provided the necessary supplies, materials, and manpower critical to the survival and success of Union forces in Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, and Indian Territory.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieve the purpose of the park and maintain its significance.

- **Original and reconstructed historic structures.** The park contains 11 original historic structures and 9 reconstructed historic structures. This collection of historic structures is recognized as the most complete example of a historic fort from the Permanent Indian Frontier. Certain structures are especially valuable for interpretation of the Bleeding Kansas period and Fort Scott's role in the Civil War.
- **Cultural landscape.** The Parade Ground and other cultural landscape features and patterns help convey the significance of Fort Scott National Historic Site. The Parade Ground at the center of the park is the open space around which many of the fort's historic structures were built, and it played a role in several of the park's historical periods. Topography, views, and spatial organization are other important features of the cultural landscape.
- **Archeological resources.** Archeological resources directly related to the period of significance for Fort Scott include artifacts and other physical remnants of past human activities from the 1842 establishment of the fort and extending through the end of the Civil War. The remnants of buildings and the materials left behind are an important source of information about the military and social history of Fort Scott and westward expansion.
- **Museum collections.** Museum collections include cultural resource and archival collections on exhibit and in storage. Some collections are stored at the NPS Midwest Archeological Center in Lincoln, Nebraska, and at the NPS multipark facility in Independence, Missouri. The museum collection includes site-related historical and archeological artifacts (primarily in storage) as well as furnishings displayed as part of museum exhibits in selected Fort Scott National Historic Site structures.



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- In the midst of the growing nation's quest for land and resources, the US Army established Fort Scott to protect Missouri settlers, enforce the promise of a homeland for relocated American Indian tribes, and settle disputes among the new neighbors. This placed the soldiers between the clashing cultures.
- Soldiers, settlers, and American Indians in and around Fort Scott each struggled to create a semblance of home and community while adapting to the challenges of the unfamiliar environment and life on the frontier.
- Through a variety of military missions in the 1840s, soldiers from Fort Scott demonstrated the power of the United States as agents of Manifest Destiny and westward expansion, resulting in opportunities for some to the detriment of others.
- In the 1850s, settlers along the Kansas-Missouri border became embroiled in a power struggle over slavery that led to intimidation, destruction, and bloodshed. This struggle foreshadowed a larger conflict that engulfed the entire nation and whose effects are still felt today.
- As with other places transformed through war, the militarized town of Fort Scott provided sanctuary to many during the Civil War, offering compassion and a safe haven for those who were displaced, destitute, diseased, and dying.
- The frontier culture along the Kansas-Missouri border, the nature of the conflict, and the need for soldiers, opened the door to African Americans and American Indians who enlisted, trained, and served at Fort Scott during the Civil War: an important step toward greater opportunity and equality of the races within the military and the nation.
- The story of the military garrison and the civilian town of Fort Scott, from frontier peacekeepers to agents of westward expansion, is the story of the United States growing up—a story of settlement and resettlement, promises made and broken, dreams shared and shattered, and the enduring struggle for the freedom of all people.

Description

Fort Scott National Historic Site is located in southeastern Kansas near the Missouri border, about 90 miles south of Kansas City. The national historic site consists of 16.69 acres of relatively level ground situated on a limestone bluff overlooking the confluence of the Marmaton River and Mill Creek. Public Law 95-484 (October 18, 1978) established the national historic site “to commemorate the significant role played by Fort Scott in the opening of the west, as well as the Civil War and strife in the State of Kansas that preceded it.”

In 1842, the US Army established Fort Scott to garrison troops charged with protecting and maintaining the peace on the Permanent Indian Frontier. This vast area consisted of lands set aside by the federal government for the resettlement of American Indian tribes relocated from traditional homelands in the East. Fort Scott served as a critical link in a north-south network of forts, and was about midway between Fort Leavenworth (later Kansas) and Fort Gibson (later Oklahoma). Strategically located along a segment of the Military Road, Fort Scott evolved from a few temporary log structures to more formally designed buildings (e.g., headquarters, officers’ quarters, barracks,

and shops) arranged around a central parade ground. Army units stationed at the fort consisted of infantry, mounted riflemen, and dragoons. Dragoons participated in expeditions along the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails, and Fort Scott soldiers fought in two important battles during the Mexican-American War (1846–1848). Fort Scott also served important military roles during the Bleeding Kansas period of the 1850s, during the Civil War when the militarized town of Fort Scott served as a US Army headquarters and supply depot, and later (1869–1873) when troops stationed at the fort protected railroad workers and private property from civil unrest.

Fort Scott was designated a national historic landmark in 1964, and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The site contains 20 historic structures (11 original, 9 reconstructed) with 33 historically furnished rooms, a parade ground, gardens, and approximately 5 acres of restored tallgrass prairie. The assemblage of buildings and elements of the cultural landscape are managed to approximate the appearance of the fort during the 1842 to 1853 period.



Key to Facilities

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| 1 Bus/RV Parking | 11 Carriage House—East (HS-32) |
| 2 Guardhouse (HS-9) | 12 Boneyard |
| 3 Hospital (HS-8) | 13 Post Bakery (HS-14) |
| 4 Infantry Barracks—West (HS-7) | 14 Quartermaster’s Stonehouse (HS-12) |
| 5 Dragoon Stables (HS-10) | 15 Trade Shop (HS-30) |
| 6 Dragoon Barracks (HS-5) | 16 Latrine (HS-22) |
| 7 Post Headquarters (HS-11) | 17 Infantry Barracks—East (HS-6) |
| 8 Carriage House—West (HS-31) | 18 Powder Magazine (HS-17) |
| 9 Stone Outbuilding (HS-36) | 19 Flagpole (HS-16) |
| 10 Officers’ Quarters (HS-1, HS-2, HS-4) | 20 Well and Canopy (HS-15) |