



ARTICLE

Nicodemus Newsletter March 2025

Nicodemus National Historic Site (<https://www.nps.gov/nico/>)



Nicodemus NHS acquired the historic First Baptist Church in 2024. We look forward to planning restoration of the historic building.
NPS Photo / Valerie Blubaugh

2024: A Remarkable Year for Nicodemus

2024 has truly been a whirlwind year for Nicodemus National Historic Site. We welcomed 7,535 visitors and made remarkable achievements. The momentum we've built over the past four years has resulted in significant and forward looking progress. Here are some of the highlights: Historic Preservation: We proudly acquired the historic First Missionary Baptist Church, an important site milestone. This was only possible through partnerships with the Trust for Public Land, National Park Foundation and the First Nicodemus Missionary Baptist Church congregation.

Visitor Enhancements

We installed a new audio system and projector with a movie-sized screen. We also added new benches for visitors to comfortably enjoy the surrounding area and refreshed the visitor center floors.

Programs and Events

We held events like the Chautauqua, a quilting program, a Holiday Program, and the beloved annual 4th Grade Days, which was the largest it's ever been.

Guided Tours

Our Park Guides enjoyed providing weekly guided tours during the summer and sharing stories of Nicodemus with eager audiences—one of our favorite parts of the job!

Exhibits

We introduced a new visual exhibit with the addition of a wagon parked next to the A.M.E. Church, giving visitors a glimpse of 1877 transportation.

These are just a few of the incredible accomplishments we achieved in 2024. We are thankful for the Nicodemus community, who made it all possible. Come visit us, and we'll be delighted to share even more!



A 4th grade class from O'Loughlin Elementary in Hays poses during a field trip to Nicodemus in April 2024.
NPS Photo / Dan Cox

Superintendent's Note

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As we begin the new year, I want to highlight some of the wonderful activities that have brought our community together. From the Chautauqua event, Homecoming, and community interviews led by Park Guide Dan Cox, we celebrated Nicodemus in a variety of ways this past year. We also welcomed new faces, like that of Park Guide Valerie Blubaugh and Maintenance Worker Tyler Blind. We bid farewell to Kevin Eads, Superintendent at Fort Larned NHS, who retired after years of dedicated support for the National Park Service and Nicodemus.

In 2025, we'll start planning for the town's 150th anniversary in 2027 and other exciting events this year like new ranger programs and in-school presentations. Community partnering is key to telling the complete Nicodemus story and the continued preservation of the town's historic structures. I will continue to attend community group meetings throughout the year and welcome invites to other gatherings so that I may gain new perspectives from the thriving community of people who care so much about this special place.

Thank you for your support!

Warm regards,
Cassie Branstetter, Superintendent



In 2024, Nicodemus NHS hosted several viewings of the "Ellis Trail to Nicodemus" documentary, created by the Nicodemus Historical Society and Abt Films.

NPS Photo

Our Plans for 2025

Nicodemus National Historic Site has some exciting projects planned out for 2025 and the addition of some new faces. Rusty Eads joined us in January as the site's new maintenance work leader. Rusty is originally from Arkansas and has spent 15 years working in various maintenance positions at six National Park sites. Most recently, Rusty supported Agate Fossil Beds National Monument in Nebraska. Christine Holtslander also joined the Nicodemus NHS team in January. She will be the new Administrative Officer for both Fort Larned NHS and Nicodemus NHS.

2025 will see the introduction of new interpretive exhibits at the park. Look for updated interpretive panels hanging on the walls of the Township Hall and a new exhibit at which visitors can listen to some of the oral histories collected from Nicodemus descendants over the years. There will also be a new Junior Ranger book designed this year, with creative and engaging illustrations to connect the next generation with the story of Nicodemus.

Park Ranger LueCreasea Horne is providing educational programs to local schools. She is willing to travel, so please reach out if you are interested in having the Nicodemus story shared at your local school! We are also providing virtual visits to classrooms.

Park staff are pursuing funding opportunities for the restoration of the historic First Baptist Church and continuing with maintenance of the A.M.E. Church and the Township Hall. New front doors will be installed at the Township Hall this year, along with a fresh coat of paint on the interior walls.

Keep an eye on the park's website and social media accounts to learn more about the events that we will host throughout the year!

A New (Re-)Discovery

After further digging into local newspapers, rangers have uncovered the forgotten death date of Francis "Jenny" Fletcher, first schoolteacher in Nicodemus, dress shop owner, and wife of early settler Zachary Fletcher. While we know the date of Zach Fletcher's death—February 14, 1927, buried in Nicodemus Cemetery—Jenny has no headstone, and her date of death was lost from memory.

On Thursday, January 14, 1897, The People's Reveille of Hill City reported that "The wife of Z.T. Fletcher, of Nicodemus, died of consumption last Saturday." This places her death on **January 9th, 1897**. On January 23rd, the A.M.E. Church, which Jenny helped organize, issued a heartfelt resolution in The Hill City Republican, writing that "the wisdom and ability which she has exercised it the aid of our church by service, contribution and counsel, will be held in grateful remembrance" and that her passing "proves a serious loss to the community and the public."

While this is a sad detail, it sheds some more light on the life and impact of an early and influential Nicodemus settler.



Brown v. Board of Education NHS presented at the 2024 Nicodemus Homecoming.
NPS Photo / Valerie Blubaugh

Tips for Visiting Nicodemus

Getting Here

Nicodemus might be out of the way but is well worth the visit! We are located on U.S. Highway 24 in between Stockton and Hill City.

Parking

Street parking is free and the only method of visitor parking in Nicodemus. Nicodemus is an active community, so please be mindful of private property and do not block driveways. RVs and



When the weather is pleasant, a walking tour of Nicodemus is a great way to learn about the town's fascinating history!
NPS Photo

trucks with trailers can easily use street parking or park at the small rest area north of the Township Hall.

Hours and Seasons

Nicodemus National Historic Site is open year-round, Thursday through Monday. Our hours are 9 am to 5 pm the entire year. We are closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. We also close for inclement weather such as heavy snow and ice storms. These closures are announced on our social media pages and our [website \(https://www.nps.gov/nico/index.htm\)](https://www.nps.gov/nico/index.htm).

You're here! Now what?

Once you get to Nicodemus, there is plenty of history to learn and explore. In the Township Hall Visitor Center we have many exhibits for you to discover and several short films to enjoy. You can ask rangers questions and pick up any of our brochures or a Junior Ranger book. The Township Hall also contains a bookstore managed by the Western National Parks Association where you can buy books and souvenirs related to Nicodemus.

There are 5 historic buildings in Nicodemus to discover. Pick up a Walking Tour brochure from the visitor center as a guide, which has a town map and brief history of all five buildings.

The buildings are all within a few blocks of each other and are accessible by car, bicycle, or on foot. Like the Township Hall, visitors are welcome to explore inside the A.M.E Church Thursday-Monday, 9 am-5 pm. The A.M.E. Church has been restored to how it looked in the 1940s and contains both historic furnishings and informational exhibits.

Are you interested in a ranger-guided tour? We do those too! If time and staffing permits, you can ask a ranger about town tours or call ahead to schedule.

Visiting After Hours

When the buildings are closed, you can still grab brochures outside the Township Hall and explore Nicodemus. In addition to the Walking Tour brochure, we also offer two guided audio tours on the free NPS app. One is a guided tour of the townsite and the other is a driving tour of Nicodemus Township, based on the tour developed by the Nicodemus Historical Society.

We also invite you to learn more about Nicodemus, its history, and its significant people and places on our [website \(https://www.nps.gov/nico/index.htm\)](https://www.nps.gov/nico/index.htm).

That's Nicodemus in a nutshell. Thanks for reading and we hope to see you in 2025!

Volunteer Corner

We dearly miss our 89-year-young, vivacious, and dedicated volunteer, Clementine Bates—affectionately known as Tina. With her move with husband James to her home country of Belgium to enjoy time with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, we have lost a devoted member of our site. Tina's passion for sharing the history of Nicodemus was unmatched. She was always the first to arrive and the last to leave, pouring her heart into educating visitors about this historic site.

Years ago, Tina married James Bates, a descendant of Nicodemus. The rich history and significance of this place quickly became a part of her life. It was evident every day in the enthusiasm she brought to her work. While we miss her deeply, we take comfort in knowing she's having a wonderful time indulging in Belgium's chocolate, savoring wine, and undoubtedly sharing stories about Nicodemus with everyone she meets.

Thank you for everything, Tina!

If you're interested in volunteering at our park, we'd love to hear from you. We're always looking for passionate individuals to join our team.

Contact: LueCreasea Horne
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Volunteer Tina Bates and Nicodemus staff during her farewell party.
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