

Fort McKavett

HABS No. TX-3111

22 miles west of Menard

Texas

HABS
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District of Texas - 3

Historic American Buildings Survey

Bartlett Cocke, District Officer

615 Maverick Bldg., San Antonio, Texas

FORT MCKAVETT

Ft. McKavett, Menard County, Texas.

Present Owner: School Building: Menard County Board of Education
Menard, Texas.
Officers' quarters: George Crump, James Pullen,
B.M. Stockton, Ft. McKavett, Texas.
Barracks: Baylor Arnold, McKavett, Texas.
Hospital, Bakery, Feed Bars, Corrals, Powder Maga-
zine: Mrs. Katherine Ball, Dallas, Texas.
Officer's Mess: Mrs. Frank Bihl, Ft. McKavett, Texas.
Officer of the Day and Guard House: C.B. Baker,
McKavett, Texas.

Date of Erection: 1852-53

Architect: E. Weigle

Builder: E. Weigle

Present Condition: Fair

Number of Stories: One and Two

Materials of Construction: Limestone, oak, pine and cypress.

Other Existing Records: Archives of the War Department

Additional Data:

Fort McKavett is located on a small plateau consisting of approximately thirty acres. The plateau is about fifty feet higher than the surrounding country. This affords a view of approximately a mile in every direction. The San Saba River flows within a half mile of the west side of the fort. Water for the fort was obtained from a spring located about one quarter of a mile southwest of the hospital, and was hauled over a road of cobble stones and flag stones. The lime kiln and quarry were located near the spring.

West of the San Saba river was a small settlement of farmers, Mexicans, a few friendly Indians, settlers and camp followers; the settlement as known as "Scab Town". The "government" truck gardens were located on that side of the river near "Scab Town."

When the fort was first established on March 14, 1852, it was called Camp San Saba. Troops were withdrawn in 1863. The principal purpose of establishing Camp San Saba, and reestablishing a garrison there in 1868, was to protect the settlers from hostile Indians, especially the three tribes of Comanches who inhabited the region within a radius of sixty to a hundred miles.

In the summer of 1852 Major Edmund B. Alexander was in command. The garrison consisted of five companies The 8th Infantry numbering 185 men and seven officers. The fort was abandoned in 1859, but was regarrisoned in 1868 and at that time named Fort McKavett in honor of Captain Henry McKavett of the 8th New York Infantry, who was killed in the Battle of Monterrey, September 21, 1846. The Fort was finally abandoned June 30th, 1883.

After the regarrisoning of the fort in 1868, considerable repair work was done by the negro troops stationed there under General McKenzie. A saw mill was built on the bank of the San Saba River in the town of Menardville, now Menard, which was operated by troops. This is the source of much of the cypress found in the buildings of Ft. McKavett. Although Ft. McKavett is one of the older forts of the frontier, it remains in a fair state of preservation today.

All buildings are built of limestone, walls varying from 18" to 24" in thickness; limestone was laid up in lime mortar; the lime was burned locally. The stone is quite hard, and while it made excellent building stone, it produced a rather poor lime. Woodwork was pine, oak or cypress. Cypress and oak are native to the locality; pine was hauled from Austin. All buildings have pitched roofs covered with cypress shingles. Each building has at least two fireplaces, none of which are outstanding in construction or design. Exterior walls were unfinished; interiors were plastered. Flooring was one inch random width, tongue and grooved pine. Window and door frames were of pine; sills of cypress. Lintels were oak; joists and rafters were pine and cypress. Wood ceilings were probably of a later date.

The following is a brief description of the various buildings:

Officers' Quarters: The ones left standing consist of four buildings along the east side of the quadrangle in a line running north and south, and four on the south side of the parade ground, in a line running east and west. These buildings are practically the same in plan and design. They consist of four or five rooms, L shaped, have pitched roofs, and porches across the entire front.

Commanding Officer's Quarters: This building is part one story and part two story. The north front is two story, and consists of two large rooms and a stair hall on each floor. A one story porch

extends across the north front. The rear wing, or L, is one story, housing the dining room, kitchen, servants room and the stable. The walls only of the stable are standing; remainder of the wing is in a fair state of preservation. It is popular belief that General Robert E. Lee lived in the northwest room of the lower floor when in that locality.

General Headquarters: This building is approximately 85' square in plan, contains six rooms, and was used as general headquarters by the staff. The roof plan is quite unusual. East, West and South sides are hipped; north side consists of twin gables; plan of roof thus form a U. The room on the southeast corner was used as an office by Col. Robert E. Lee. The one to the west was used by Albert Sydney Johnston. The building is now in good condition.

Barracks: This building is approximately 150' long and 30' wide and contains three large rooms. The west side of this building forms the east line of the parade grounds; the east side faces the officers' quarters on the extreme Eastern side of the fort. In the center of the west wall, and approximately six feet above the ground, is a tablet with a wreath design in relief, engraved as follows: "B. Co. 8 Inf. 1853 U.S. Army Weigle." At the north end of this building, extending east and west, are ruins of the other barrack which was destroyed by fire several years ago.

Feed Barns and Horse Corrals: The two feed barns are still standing today. They closely resemble the barracks in plan and design. One of these is situated on the extreme north of the group and the other directly across the parade grounds from the barracks. The horse corrals, located to the rear of the north barn, are in ruins. Only parts of the walls are standing.

School Building: The school building is rectangular in shape, roof is pitched, and corresponds in type and construction with other buildings in the group. Upon completion of this building in 1853, it was immediately used as a school; it has been used as such continuously ever since. It is in good condition.

Hospital Building: The hospital building is one story, originally containing six large rooms which have recently been divided into additional rooms. Roof is pitched and hipped; it was originally covered with cypress shingles. The plan of the building is L shape, with a deep porch across the south and east sides. The windows in this building extend down to the floor. This building is the best preserved of any in the group.

Magazine: The small powder magazine is located about one quarter of a mile north of the fort on the banks of the San Saba River. It is rectangular in plan. The roof is flat and has been built up with rock and earth. It is in fair condition today.

Officers' Mess: This building is of the same plan, design and construction as the Officers' Quarters.

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Officer of the Day and Guard House: A small building, approximately 18' square, which was used by the Officer of the Day, still stands and is in fair condition. The guard house just to the north is in ruins. Only portions of the walls of the solitary cells and portions of the high barred windows remain.

Bakery: The bakery is identical in design and plan to the school building. The building, which is in a fair state of preservation, is now used as a residence.

Portions of this information were received from Mrs. Willie Murr, Ft. McKavett, Texas, and the "Menard Messenger", June 18, 1936.

Author: Bartlett Cocke
Bartlett Cocke, Dist. Officer

Date: February 14, 1937

WJ 5/28/37