

By the Kansas State Historical Society

Fort Scott

Fort Scott was one of several forts along the border of what was called the Indian frontier. The fort was established in 1842.

As the population of the United States grew, so did the thirst for more land. Americans wanted the lands belonging to various Indian tribes. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 forced eastern Indians to move west of the Mississippi River. More than 8,000 Indians were moved, many of them to Kansas. The U.S. Congress passed other laws that governed the relationship between Indians and whites on the frontier. Kansas was the frontier.

What was the original purpose of Fort Scott?

The United States established a series of forts on the frontier. This north-south line of forts followed what today are the eastern boundaries of Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma. A military road connected the forts. Fort Scott sat about in the middle.

Fort Scott was established for two main reasons. First, it was to maintain peace between the Indians and the settlers. The fort sat between Osage lands and settlements in the state of Missouri. Americans also were traveling across Indian lands on the Oregon-California and Santa Fe Trails. Although it was illegal to settle on Indian lands, some squatters did so. When this happened, it was the military's job to remove them.

In addition, the soldiers at the fort were to keep the peace among Indian tribes. Many of the eastern tribes that had been relocated found themselves confined to smaller areas of land. The natural resources to which they had access were foreign to them. They had little in common with their tribal neighbors. The U.S. government's actions caused stress and conflict among the tribes.

What was it like to be stationed at Fort Scott?

Fort Scott served as a way station on the military road. Other than travelers, Indians, and some Missourians, soldiers at the fort were pretty isolated. There was no town near Fort Scott.

The army did not supply soldiers with all of their needs. Sutlers were storekeepers who provided the extra supplies that soldiers and their families wanted. One of the sutlers recalled, "Fort Scott was a pleasant Post. The officers and families tho' few were sociable and neighborly.



We had few visitors outside the Post."

When the fort was established, the soldiers lived in tents. Many built temporary log huts for themselves. Eventually, permanent wood structures were built. The food for the soldiers often came by wagon from Fort Leavenworth, more than 100 miles away. The food was not always stored properly. Until vegetable gardens were planted at the fort, the food generally was of poor quality. Soldiers ate soup, stew, bread, beef, beans, and rice.



The soldiers were assigned to tend to the stables, build structures and roads, work at the sawmill, or unload supplies. Officers at Fort Scott lived better than the enlisted men. Officers could have their families with them at the fort. They also had more leisure time. Captain Sword, an officer stationed at the fort, referred to it as "dull, very dull."

Life was not dangerous at Fort Scott. There are no records of any armed conflicts with the Indians. Although the buildings at Fort Scott were better than most frontier forts, they were not clean by modern standards. A review of the post surgeon's records indicates that most soldiers fought disease.

What happened to Fort Scott?

- Fort Scott was abandoned in April 1853 when the troops were transferred to Fort Riley and other western posts. The buildings were sold to the public two years later.
- The land on which Fort Scott was built belonged to the New York Indians. Only a small number of them made claim to the land. The land that was not claimed by the Indians was given to American settlers.
- In 1857 the town of Fort Scott was established. During the territorial period proslavery followers dominated the town. Antislavery settlers lived in the surrounding areas. This often led to conflict.
- During the Civil War the fort was made active again using what buildings remained. Kansas was the first state officially to recruit African American soldiers. The 1st and 2nd Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiments were brought into the Union Army at Fort Scott. Fort Scott was abandoned at the end of the Civil War.
- Today you can visit Fort Scott National Historic Site, operated by the National Park Service.