

THE TEXAS POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY JOURNAL

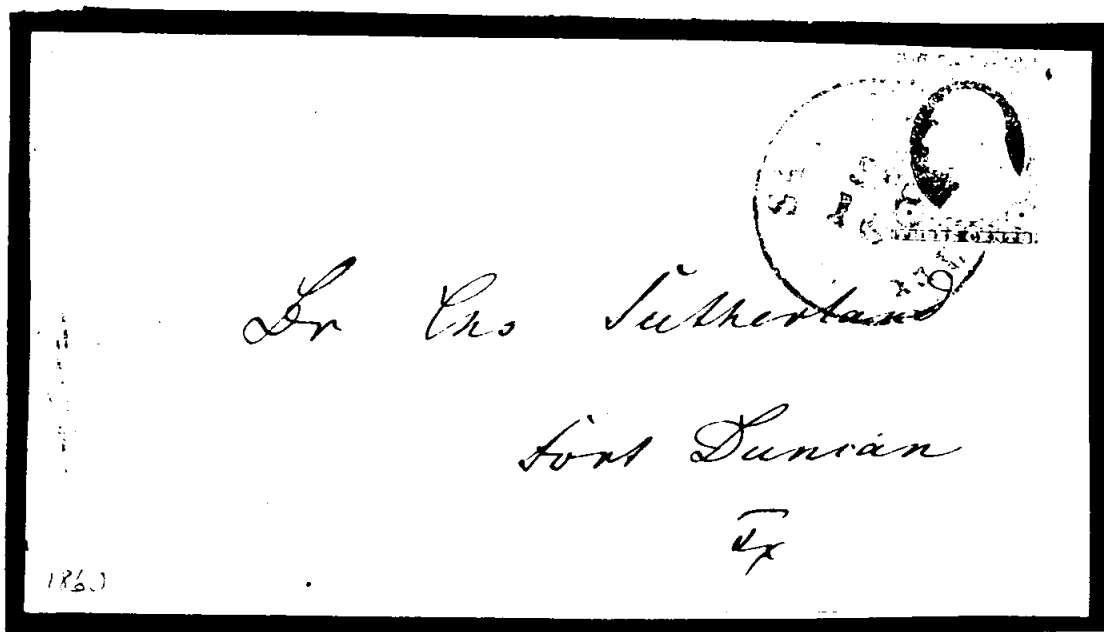


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On the front cover is a picture of an 1860 San Antonio cover, addressed to a Texas Border Fort and the subject of the first article in this issue of the Journal.

THE TEXAS POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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Vacancy

This President's page comes so closely after the publication of the last, that there is not much new news to share with the membership. So, I would like to take this opportunity to suggest some goals for the T.P.H.S.

Like my predecessor, Nonie Green, I believe we should take every opportunity, to strengthen, and to enhance, the reputation of the Texas Postal History Society. Such an achievement is not easily nor quickly accomplished, and no one individual is likely to bring such recognition from the philatelic world. It has to be a "group-effort", in which each of us believes strongly enough, and works consistently enough toward a set of goals, that others will recognize our achievements and want similar results for their own organizations. This type of success is possible, but it comes only to those who are willing to put forth the effort, the time, and the dedication to make it happen.

The mere fact that each of you receiving this journal was interested enough to join the T.P.H.S. proves that there is a deep-seated interest in Texas and Texas postal history. What then are the goals that will focus the attention of the philatelic world on Texas and our organization.

It is my opinion, that the most important activities we can participate in, are collection, research, writing, speaking and exhibiting. Now I realize, many of you will say,-- "but I can't write"-- or "but I can't speak"--or "but I don't have the material to exhibit". The most obvious response to each of these negative "protestations" is-- "but have you ever tried?" If you had never walked, or had never talked, or had never driven a car--, think what you would have missed. Likewise, when you say you can't write, or can't speak, or can't organize your postal history material for exhibit, you are in my humble opinion missing out on much of the fun and fellowship that could be yours with only a little effort. Moreover, the vast majority of the T.P.H.S. members will be engaging in some degree of deception; either of themselves, or of the person to whom they are speaking.

Resolve now, to become actively involved. Realize the multiple rewards that come from others via compliments, and from within via your increased self-satisfaction.

FORT DUNCAN - A TEXAS BORDER FORT

by William H. P. Emery

For many years after the Mexican War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, problems persisted along the Rio Grande. Outlaws like Juan Cortina, Jose Tafoya, Juan Trujillo and Julian Baca made life along the border unpleasant and uncertain. When the bandits withdrew, the Indians came in their place. They would make forays across the river to steal cattle, horses and other loot.

For security, the United States Army established a number of strong points along the Rio Grande from Brownsville to El Paso. These strong points have been termed, "The Border Forts", and their location along the Texas-Mexico border is shown in Figure 1.

Starting at the mouth of the Rio Grande, Fort Brown was established at Brownsville, Fort Ringgold at Rio Grande City, Fort McIntosh at Laredo, Fort Duncan at Eagle Pass, Fort Clark at Brackettville, Camp Hudson on the Devil's River, Fort Quitman on the Rio Grande in southern Hudspeth county, and Fort Bliss at El Paso. Most of these forts were garrisoned by cavalry units and a lesser number of infantry companies. The cavalry units allowed the troopers to move rapidly in pursuit of either outlaws or Indians.

Fort Duncan was located on the east side of the Rio Grande a short distance northwest of the present city of Eagle Pass. Established by order of Major General William J. Worth on March 27, 1849, the site was initially occupied by Captain Sidney Burbank with Companies A, B, and F of the 1st United States Infantry.

For at least seven years following establishment of this post there was controversy over the site. Some objections were based on the physical location of the fort, while others objected to construction of permanent buildings on land that was not owned nor under lease to the U.S. Army. However, by 1856 Fort Duncan consisted of more than thirty buildings of varying construction. Some buildings were of stone, some of adobe, and some were mere "jacales" (open huts with grass roofs, mud-plastered poles for sides, and mud floors). See Figure 2 for the plan of Fort Duncan as described by Col. J.K.F. Mansfield on his inspection tour of 1856.

Settlement of the area had begun during the Mexican War when Capt. J. A. Veatch and a company of Texas Mounted Volunteers set up an observation post, called Camp Eagle Pass, directly opposite the confluence of the Rio Escondido and the Rio Grande. This location, some three miles southeast of Fort Duncan, was also shared by a trading post called Campbell's Store. During the late 1840's and well into the 1850's, numerous wagon trains following the California Trail, or the Chihuahua Trail, would replenish supplies at this trading post while enjoying the protection of the military nearby.

Figure 3 shows a letter postmarked San Antonio, Tex., Sep. 16, 1860, addressed to Dr. Charles Sutherland, Fort Duncan, Tx. This letter was carried over the U.S. postal route #7966, passing twice weekly, from San Antonio to Eagle Pass via Castroville, New Fountain, D'Hanis, Sabinal, and Uvalde. Postal records show that Fort Duncan had a post office for only one year, 1851-52, after which mail for the fort was delivered to Eagle Pass. Thus, we may assume, that the letter illustrated was picked up by military courier for delivery to Fort Duncan and Dr. Sutherland.

Dr. Sutherland, the recipient of this letter is described as a large and powerful man, standing over six feet two inches in height and of corresponding bulk. He was born in Philadelphia on May 29, 1829 of a military family. His father, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School, served in the War of 1812 as an assistant surgeon, and later as lieutenant colonel of an infantry regiment.

Dr. Charles Sutherland attended private schools in Philadelphia before entering Jefferson Medical College where he graduated in 1849. After passing the examination for the medical corps of the Army in 1851 he served at various posts throughout the west. In 1860, he was ordered to Texas where he served at Fort Duncan until the outbreak of the Civil War. Avoiding capture by Confederate forces, he and the garrison he served with made their way to Brazos Santiago, where they secured boat transportation to New York. He served with distinction during the war, later rising rapidly through the ranks to become Surgeon General of the Army in 1890. He remained Surgeon General until his retirement May 29, 1893.

The precise date on which Dr. Sutherland arrived at Fort Duncan has not been determined, but it seems most probable, that he arrived with Major W.H. French on August 11, 1860, as part of the effort to re-garrison the post.

The Secretary of War, John B. Floyd, had ordered the abandonment of Fort Duncan in May 1859. All troops had left Fort Duncan for Camp Verde by June 18th leaving the post vacant, and the wagon trains unprotected.

Renewed rumors that Juan Cortina was headed toward Laredo and Eagle Pass caused Lt. Col. Robert E. Lee, commander of U.S. troops along the border, to reoccupy Fort Duncan. On March 20, 1860, Lee wrote from his headquarters at Fort Duncan the following letter;

His Exc.
Sam Houston
Governor of Texas
Austin, Texas

Hdq. Eagle Pass
20 March, 1860

Governor-

A letter from Mr. Duelos, a well known citizen of this place, for some years engaged in furnishing supplies to the Army in Texas, was sent by the Chief of the Army Corps at San Antonio on the 15th inst. stating that Cortinas with a large force was ascending the Valley of the Rio Grande, threatened to attack this village. This

report was corroborated by letters from Laredo. I therefore directed my force to this point instead of Laredo as I had intended.

I find upon my arrival that there is no truth in the report, and cannot learn that Cortinas has ascended the Rio Grande above La Mesa, 15 or 20 miles below Reynosa, since the dispersion of his followers at La Bolsa. Everything is quiet along this part of the river and the usual intercourse and commerce between Mexico and Texas uninterrupted.

I shall accordingly proceed down the Rio Grande to Laredo and if the place of that region is undisturbed will continue to Ringgold Bks.

I am unable, according to your request, to inform you as to the necessity of the presence of the Texas troops on the frontier, but that you may exercise your own judgement of the matter, I will state that there is one company of artillery at this place. One company of Infantry at Laredo, two companies of infantry are ordered to Ringgold Bks.; two companies of artillery are now at Fort Brown.

In addition, a light battery of artillery is on the way to Fort Brown, and there are at present four companies of the Second Cavalry in the field along this border.

I hope this will be sufficient force to preserve order. Knowing your anxiety for the peace of the frontier, I have taken to make you the above statement.

I am with high respect
Your obedient servant,

(Signed) R. E. Lee

Lt. Col. Comm. 8th Dept.

By January 1861, the threat of war was serious. On February 20, 1861 special orders were received by Major French directing him to send the three companies of the 1st Artillery, then stationed at Fort Duncan, to Brazos Santiago for transport to New York. One company of the 3rd Infantry remained at the fort until noon on March 20th, after which the post was turned over to John C. Crawford, agent for the State of Texas and the Confederacy.

Throughout the Civil War the post was known as Rio Grande Station and was garrisoned by Texas troops of the Frontier Regiment. However, the garrison usually consisted of from fifteen to thirty men and provided little protection for either settlers or travelers. Indians and bandits roamed virtually unchecked both during and immediately following the Civil War.

August Santleben in his book, "A Texas Pioneer", recalls many tales that emphasize conditions around Fort Duncan immediately after the war. Santleben writes:

"On one of my trips in 1866 I was traveling westward entirely alone and when about eighteen miles from Eagle Pass I drove into a camp, about three o'clock in the afternoon, where nine Mexican carts were standing by the roadside. The bodies of the drivers were scattered around where they had been killed and some of them scalped by Indians. Evidently the murders were committed not more than three hours before and apparently when the men stopped for dinner".

Fig 2
PLAN OF FORT DUNCAN, TEXAS

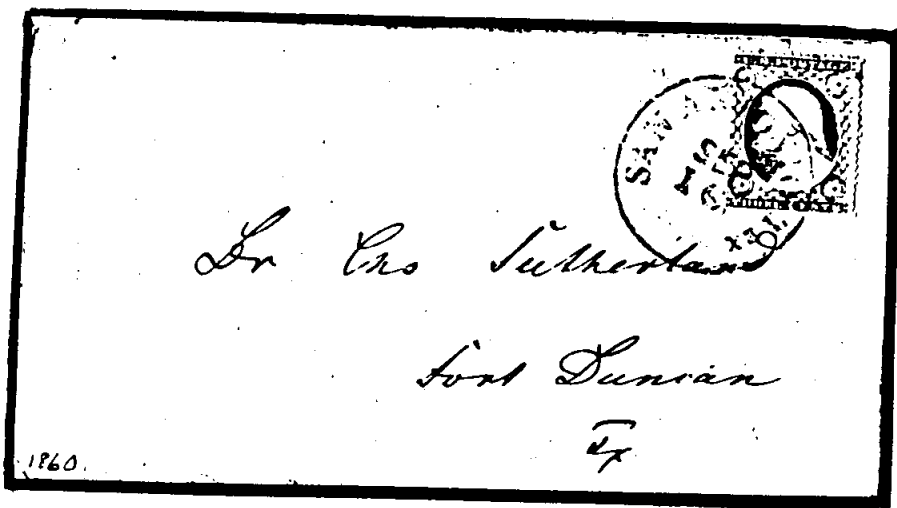
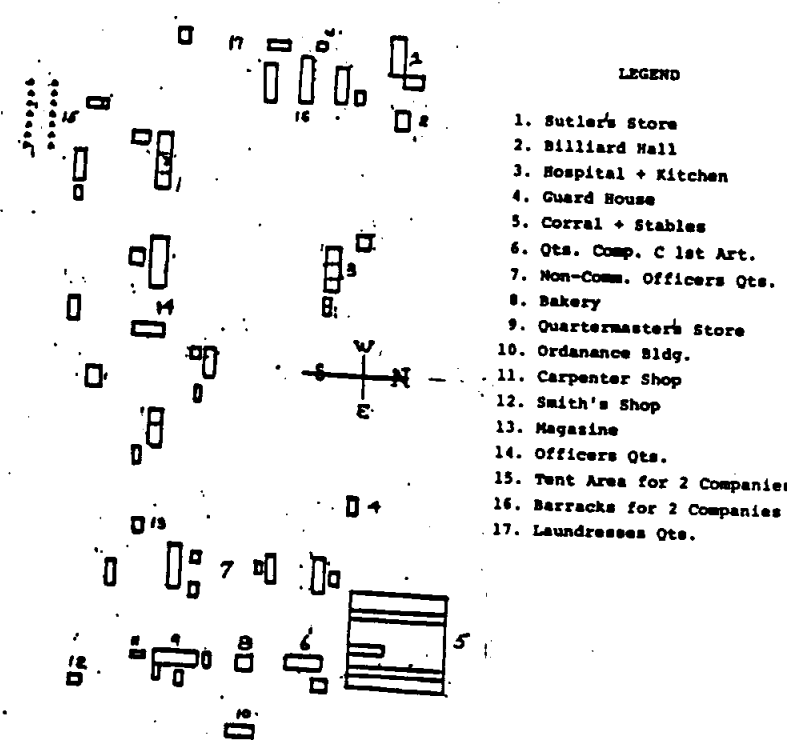
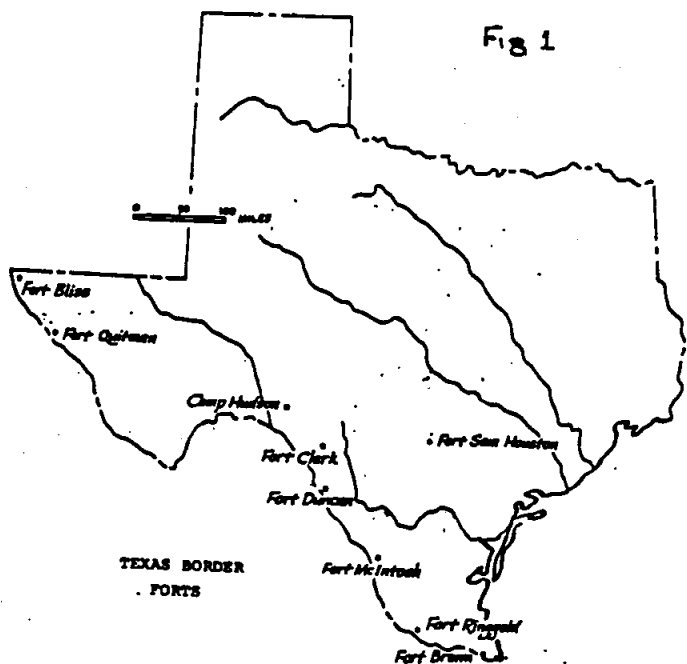
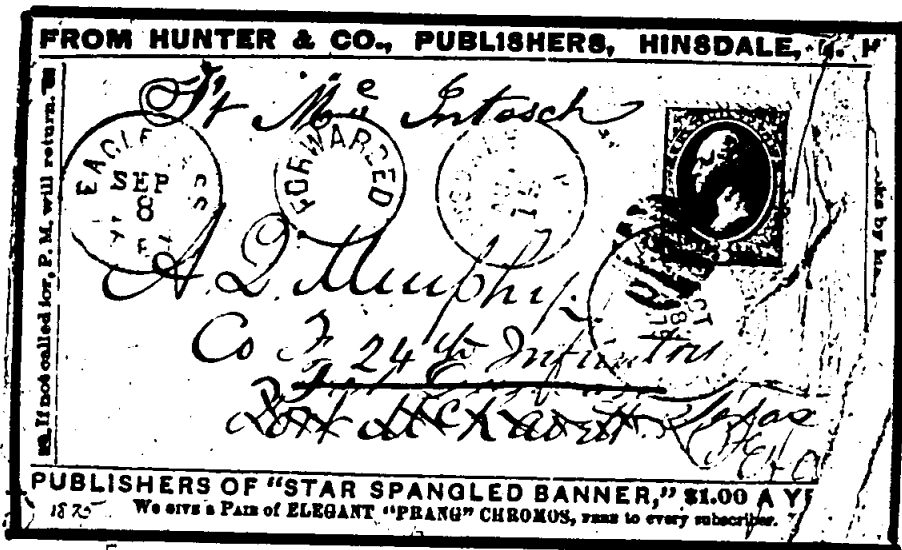


Figure 3

Figure 4



On another trip in July of 1866 he recalls:

"The Indians sometimes were very bold--- they exhibited their adroitness as thieves in the vicinity, and the performance caused the good people of that town considerable inconvenience. It happened in connection with a patriotic occasion, on the 4th of July, when the citizens were enjoying themselves at a ball, that was given in honor of our national anniversary, to which everyone was invited.

"The abandoned United States post that is known in history as Fort Duncan was selected as a suitable place for the celebration, and the hospital, with a floor space measuring about 30 x 100 feet, was chosen for dancing purposes. The arrangements were all perfected by Thomas B. McManus, the customs-house officer at Eagle Pass, with the assistance of Henry Bruhn, of San Antonio, the father-in law of Otto Evert and Ed Galm of said city.

"The Mexican customs-house officers from Piedras Negras, with their families, all the best people from Eagle Pass, and the settlements along the river were in attendance. Those who rode horseback secured the animals to the buildings or surrounding trees and gave them no further attention after joining in the dancing or other pleasures of the occasion. No apprehension of danger was entertained, and nothing occurred to mar the happiness of the evening that gave life to the old fort which caused it to resound with joyous mirth until the early tints of dawn admonished the participants to close their revels.

"Those who first departed returned hastily and caused a scene of excitement by announcing that all the horses had disappeared except a few that were tied to the gallery posts of the building. The evidence was clear that the revelers had been made the victims of an Indian raid, and the impudent enterprise was shrewdly executed. The skulking savages only took advantage of the distracting incidents of the occasion, and without interrupting the festivities quietly left them to return to their homes on foot. They were less merciful to two poor Mexicans who left Eagle Pass that morning on an oxcart with the intention of hauling wood, who were killed by them below town."

The tales, related by Santleben, are but a few of many incidents that occurred around Fort Duncan in the post war years. Thus, in March of 1868 Federal troops were once again "ordered to garrison the post. By September, the post had a contingent of three companies consisting of 14 officers and 201 enlisted men, commanded by Brevet Col. William R. Shafter.

The Indian raids continued despite the presence of a relatively large force of U.S. Troops. The chief difficulty was that neither the cavalry nor the infantry were able to follow the tracks of the marauding Comanche and Lipan Indians.

Finally, nearly twenty years after it was first suggested by Cora Montgomery of Eagle Pass, the Army on July 1, 1870, invited the Seminole Negro Indians, then in Mexico, to cross into Texas and enlist as scouts

for the U.S. Army. The first group of Seminoles to accept were enlisted as a group at Fort Duncan on August 16, 1870. Later, in the campaign of 1874-75, these Seminole scouts were instrumental in assisting the U.S. troops in clearing the plains Indians from West Texas.

Figure 4 shows a most interesting and well traveled cover that reached Fort Duncan in 1875. This is an over-all advertising cover sent from a Hinsdale, N.H. publishing firm to a trooper A.F. Murphy, Co. F, 24th Infantry at Fort McKavett. It was forwarded to Eagle Pass and Fort Duncan, before catching up with the trooper at Fort McIntosh. The cover, posted in Hinsdale, N.H. on Aug. 19th, was postmarked at Eagle Pass on Sept. 8th, and finally reached Fort McIntosh on Oct. 18, 1875, just two months after leaving the publisher.

By 1875, the days of the large garrisons and frequent cavalry patrols were nearing an end at Fort Duncan, for the post was soon to become a substation of Fort Clark.

Toward the end of 1883, even the name of the post was changed to Camp Eagle Pass, reflecting the diminished activity and importance of the post.

A cavalry post was established in 1891 at Camp Eagle Pass and new efforts by the Army were made to purchase the land and buildings that had constituted Fort Duncan. Finally in 1894, after more than 40 years of negotiation, the Army purchased the property. Both time and vandals had reduced the buildings to ruinous condition. The neglect in maintaining the buildings cost the Army severely in the financial outlay to restore them for use.

The fort was occupied irregularly during the border troubles with Mexico (1910-14) and again at the start of World War I. Fort Duncan was abandoned for the last time in 1916 and now serves as a city park for the City of Eagle Pass.

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THE CASE OF THE MISSING POST OFFICE

By Elwyn Doubleday with Richard Helbock
(Reprinted from La Posta: A Journal of American Postal History)

My trip to the New York A.S.D.A. show had not been a real success. Despite spending a full day searching the stocks of every dealer there, I had only been able to purchase a small stack of covers. Realistically speaking, expenses for the trip had topped philatelic expenditures by a fair amount. Though well attended by many of America's leading dealers, looking at the covers was like a reunion, for I saw many "old friends" in their cover boxes which I had seen countless other times at similar affairs.

One of the dealers did have a large box of "junque"; culls as they were of various lots he'd purchased, items that for one reason of another simply didn't fit well the "quality" of items he vended to his regular clientele. However, I was welcome to go through this hodgepodge of covers with stamps missing, oversized envelopes, and tattered items. If I found something I'd like, he'd be glad to quote me a price, but I was warned not to expect too much.

As I thumbed through the group of about 5000 covers, I made a small pile of things that looked interesting and offered a possibility that with research or repair might afford me an opportunity to buy my way out of my trip to New York. Ultimately I found 97 covers that looked interesting and, after a few moments contemplation, the dealer and I came to a mutually satisfactory figure. To be sure, the price was not cheap, but at least I had an interesting group to take home and play with.

Upon arriving at home I took my pile of covers and started researching what I had accumulated. One small group of covers had aroused my interest when I had picked them out. This consisted of three cover fronts and one full cover all franked with Scott's #10 with manuscript postmarks of "Frontera P.O., Texas", or simply "Frontera P.O." Three were dated 1852, the fourth had no year date. I had rarely seen #10's used from Texas, and, despite the fact that three were indeed only fronts, I figured that I had little to lose by investing in these items.

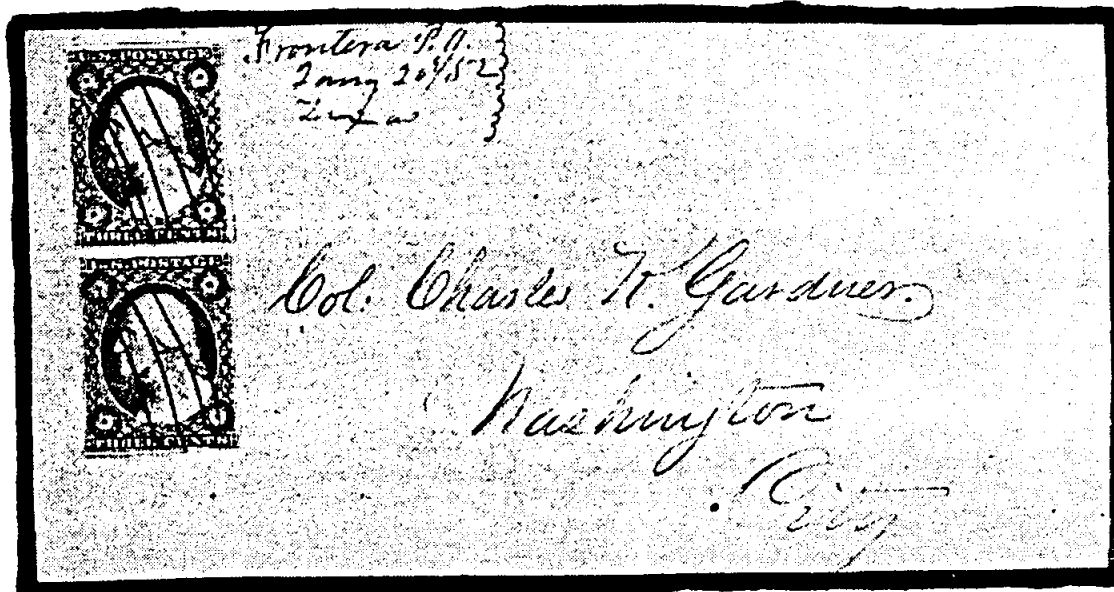


Figure 1

I reached for my Texas postal history manuals. I decided to find out if Frontera was perhaps a D.P.O. "The Texas Postal History Handbook" by Charles Deaton was my first attempt. Turning to page 98 in the listing of Texas post offices, I found that the list went from "Frogmore" to "Frosa" with no Frontera listed. I was pleasantly surprised, but assumed perhaps it represented either an accidental omission, or that perhaps I was reading the manuscript postmark incorrectly. After a few more attempts looking for "Trontera" and "Fraptera" and the like, I was dutifully satisfied that my post office, whatever it was, was not to be found in this reference.

Undaunted, I next pulled out Ter Braake's, "Texas: The Drama of Its Postal past", and, after a through perusal, determined that Frontera was not mentioned there either. With this failure, I concluded my research for the day.

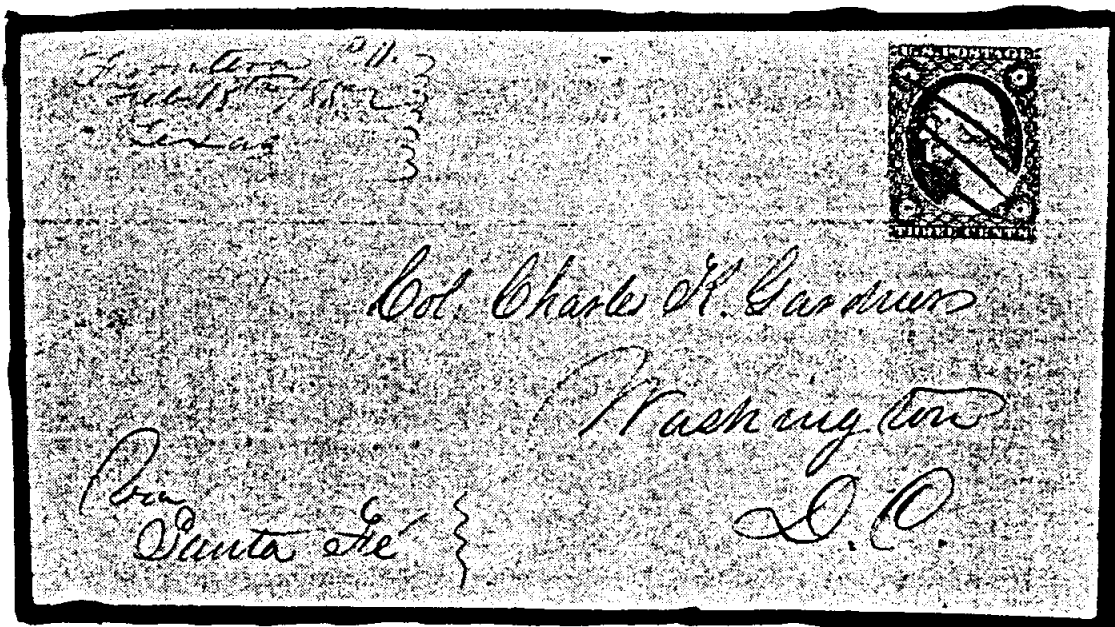
The following day I picked up my little stock of covers again and looked at them carefully, hoping some clue might reveal their secret to me. The first, a cover front (Fig. 1), has a neat magenta postmark reading "Frontera P.O. 7 Jan. 20th/52/texas", and two sickly-colored #10's with manuscript cancels in black. Although attractive, it really offers no clue.



Figure 2

Figure 2 features a matching magenta "P.O./Frontera/14 Feb 52"--this time with no mention of Texas--and four single copies of #10 with both magenta and additional black manuscript cancels. In the lower left hand corner a routing of "Via San Antonio" is noted. This pointed to south or west Texas in my mind.

The third cover front (Fig. 3) is also franked with a #10, and both the stamp and postmark are canceled in the same attractive magenta ink. It is dated Feb. 18th, 1852, and once again Texas is mentioned.



The most interesting feature here is the routing instructions; "Via Santa Fe". I assumed that this definitely hinted at a west Texas origin.

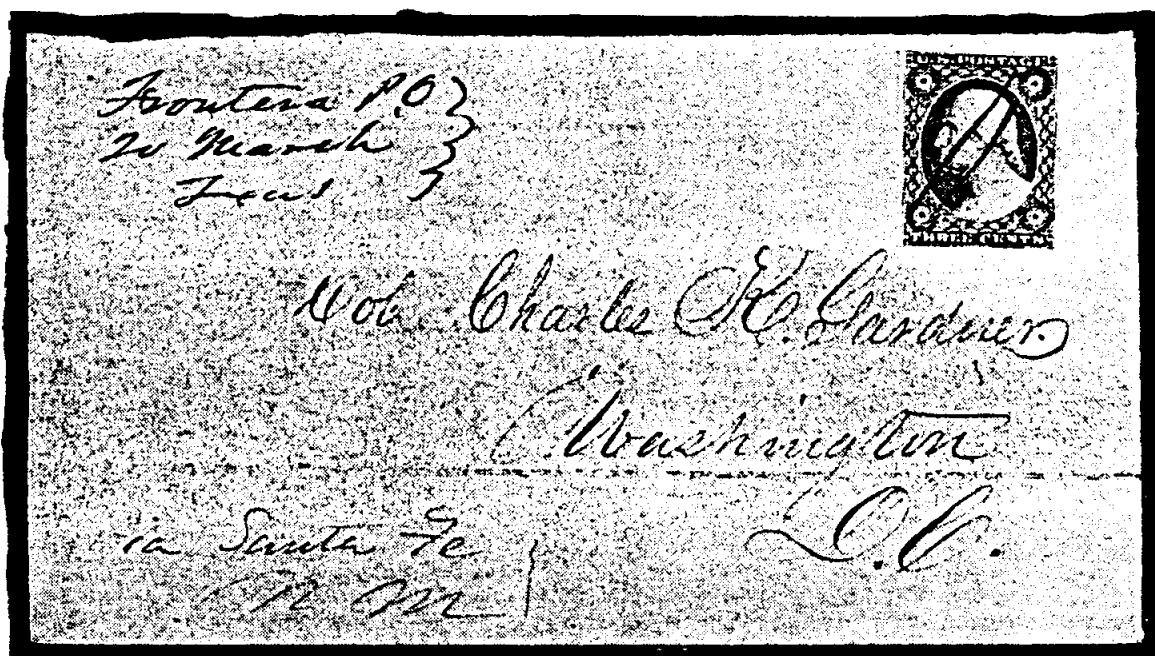


Figure 4 is a full cover. This time the postmark and cancel are in black. Dated "20 March", the cover bears a "Via Santa Fe/N.M." notation. With west Texas on my mind, I returned to Deaton's work and noted that El Paso had been established in 1852. Could this have been an early name for the El Paso post office I wondered?

In my quest to locate Frontera I decided that perhaps a look in my copy of the 1853 New and Complete Statistical Gazetteer of the United States of America by R. S. Fisher, M.D., might yield a clue. I found the following reference on page 235; "Frontera, Postal Village, Socorro Co., N. Mex"! The book explained that post office listings were for

June 1, 1851. At last my Frontera was located for it was the only such listing of a town by this name. But why did the postmaster list Texas? I next turned to Haywood's United States Gazetteer of 1853, and found no Frontera listed in the place names. Turning to the list of post offices in the rear of the book, I found no listing under Texas, but on page 831 "Frontera P.O." was listed in Socorro Co., N. Mex. Territory.

The six-cent and 12-cent rates made a bit of sense now, for the prepaid one-half ounce rate was six cents as of July 1 of 1851. The 12-cent rate represented a double-weight letter. The two items bearing three cents postage via Santa Fe apparently just squeezed by under the 3000 mile rate, or the postmaster conveniently decided that they did.

Now armed with the knowledge that I had early New Mexico items-- even though the postmaster said Texas-- I eagerly turned to The Post Offices of New Mexico by Richard Helbock. Oops! The much maligned Frontera post office was no where to be found! By this time I decided that a call to Bill might help shed some light on my covers, and from this point on I'll let Bill continue the story.

When Elwyn called and began talking about Frontera post office he jarred a chord in my memory, but I didn't have the answer on the tip of my tongue. Why did Frontera sound so familiar, and why had I chosen to omit it from my New Mexico post office listing? It had been seven years since the listing was published, and I had not worked with New Mexico postal history very much since then.

The first thing I did after hanging up the phone was to dig out my copies of the microfilms of the "Records of Appointments of Postmasters" for New Mexico. I cranked the handle of my reader until I reached Socorro County, and low and behold there were three post offices established-- the first in the county-- all established the same date: April 17, 1851. The offices were: Socorro with Vincente St. Vrain as postmaster, San Elizario with William Smith as postmaster; and Frontera with Thomas White as postmaster. Now it all began to come back to me.

The creation of Socorro County, New Mexico, is surrounded in mystery. When the United States created New Mexico Territory in 1850, the Territory was divided into seven counties which were unchanged from the last years of Mexican rule. The Second Legislative Assembly was the first on record to make changes in the county structure, and one of the things that they did was to create Dona Ana County on January 6, 1852, from "that part of Socorro County lying south of an east and west line passing through the center of the Laguna in the Jornada." The problem with this is that Socorro County was not one of the original seven counties. No record exists which indicates when it was created, but it was obviously erected sometime between 1850 and January 1852. The point of this historical excursion is that in April 1851 all New Mexico lands lying south of the town of Socorro to the border of Texas were in Socorro County. Furthermore, the exact location of the boundary separating New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico was a matter of intense debate.

The Texas claim to all lands lying east of the Rio Grande and north from its source were largely settled by the Compromise of 1850, but in the El Paso area confusion caused by the shifting course of the river led to a dispute that was not finally resolved until 1930. The real problems, however, dealt with the boundary between New Mexico and Mexico. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ceded New Mexico to the United States, stated that "--the southern and western limits of New Mexico-- are those laid down in the map--- published in New York in 1847 by J. Disturnell." The Disturnell Map showed a southern boundary starting about eight miles above El Paso on the Rio Grande, running due west for three degrees of longitude, and then running north to the Gila River. Unfortunately, Disturnell had incorrectly located El Paso about 100 miles east of its true location, which through the question of ownership of the rich farm lands of the Mesilla Valley lying north of El Paso into an increasingly bitter debate between Mexican and American officials. The matter was finally solved by the terms of the Gadsden Purchase, but that treaty was not signed until December 30, 1853. It is easy to understand the confusion and disagreement between the postmaster and postal authorities in Washington concerning the proper assignment of the three new post offices established in April 1851. The Post Office Department, knowing probably little more than that these offices were south of Santa Fe, assumed that they must be in the newly created county of Socorro. After all, they had the same name. The Frontera postmaster, knowing exactly where his office was located and obviously having strong feelings about local boundaries despite what the politicians were saying, identified his location as Texas.

Meanwhile, Helbock, compiling a list of New Mexico post offices 120 years after the fact, sided with the Frontera postmaster because, at the time the listing was compiled I was living in the Mesilla Valley and I knew where Frontera post office had been located.

In fact, I now believe that all three of those offices listed in Socorro County, New Mexico-- including the Socorro post office-- were actually in Texas. Vincentre St. Vrain and William "Uncle Billy" Smith were two of the founding fathers of El Paso. There are still communities in the El Paso area named Socorro and San Elizario. Those offices-- provided they ever actually operated-- were almost certainly in the vicinity of El Paso.

The Frontera post office was located a little bit north of El Paso at a point where the Rio Grande enters a canyon to cut its way through the Franklin Mountains. This area, now within the city limits, has come to be known as Smelertown. The site was identified on the map accompanying the El Paso & Fort Yuma Wagon Road Report of 1857-8.

All three of these post offices were discontinued on March 12, 1852, probably the same time that the El Paso office was established although I do not have access to that date. The Socorro post office was re-established September 28, 1852, but my guess is that this was the actual start of the currently operating Socorro, Socorro County, New Mexico office.

Elwyn had made an exciting discovery. Tom Todsén lists only one other postmark recorded from Frontera in his latest New Mexico Territorial Postmark Catalog. I'd say that any day you can go to a show and pull four examples of a very rare postmark from a dealer's "junque box" is a day worthy of marking down on your calendar.