

THE TEXAS POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY JOURNAL

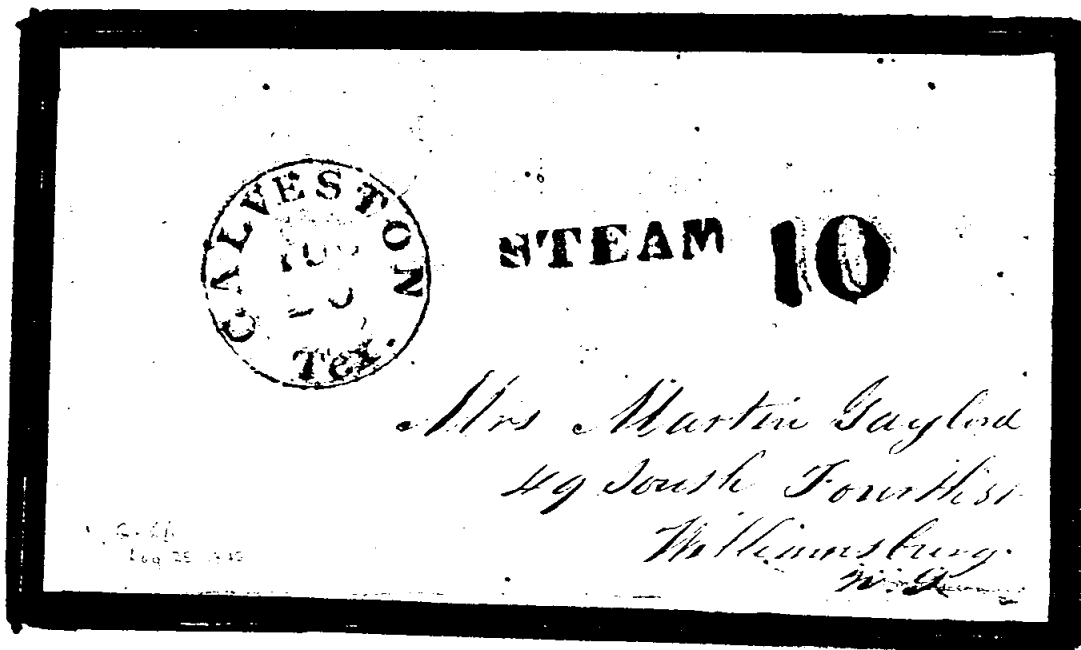


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Illustrated on the front cover of this issue is a stampless folded letter, dateline August 25, 1846. The postal markings are all in bright blue ink, beginning on the left with a circle-date-stamp of Galveston, Tex., type G-6b, 30mm. in diameter. In the middle is the printed STEAM, 29mm x 5mm. and at the right end the printed 10¢ rate. The act of March 3, 1845 stated that, "Private steamboat letters and printed matter received from a steamboat not under postal contract, taxed same rate as if they had been carried in the U.S. Mail, by postmaster at receiving post offices."

THE TEXAS POSTAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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We're approaching the end of the year- and for the T.P.H.S. the end of an era. Bill Emery is vacating the position of Journal Editor and Karl Gebert that of Treasurer. Karl has faithfully handled this job for four years and Bill has filled the Editors spot for ten years! All members owe them a debt of gratitude for the work they've done on behalf of the T.P.H.S.

Bill's last job will be to see that everyone gets a copy of the 20 year Index for the Journal. The Index will allow all members to research any article or story that has been in the Journal since the formation of the Society. Also note on page 12 that back issues are still available for sale. You still have a chance to get any issue put out since the publication began in 1975.

The end of the year also means it's time to vote and to send in your dues for 1996. You will note that Lyle Boardman of Austin has been nominated for our Treasurer's position. Lyle is currently Treasurer of the Texas Philatelic Association and a life long member of the T.P.H.S. His Philatelic Biography can be found on page 7. I surely hope you elect him. We'll be in trouble if you don't.

And don't forget to send those articles and news items to our new Journal Editor, Martin Margulis. You don't have to wait until Jan. 1st to send him material. Send it now.

Here's wishing all of you a Happy Holiday Season. Hope lots of Texas Postal History comes your way in 1996.

Good Collectin'

Ed

A TEXAS EMPRESARIO'S LETTER
by R. H. Stever

Figure 1 is a reduced scale map of Medina County, Texas. Research for this map was done by Myron Janzen and John Germann for their Texas county project. Towns with currently active post offices are shown with open circles, DPO's with solid circles. Triangles are drawn around three communities laid out in the 1840's by Henri Castro. He founded Castroville in 1844, Quihi in 1845, Vandenburg (not on the map) in 1846 and D'Hannis in 1847.

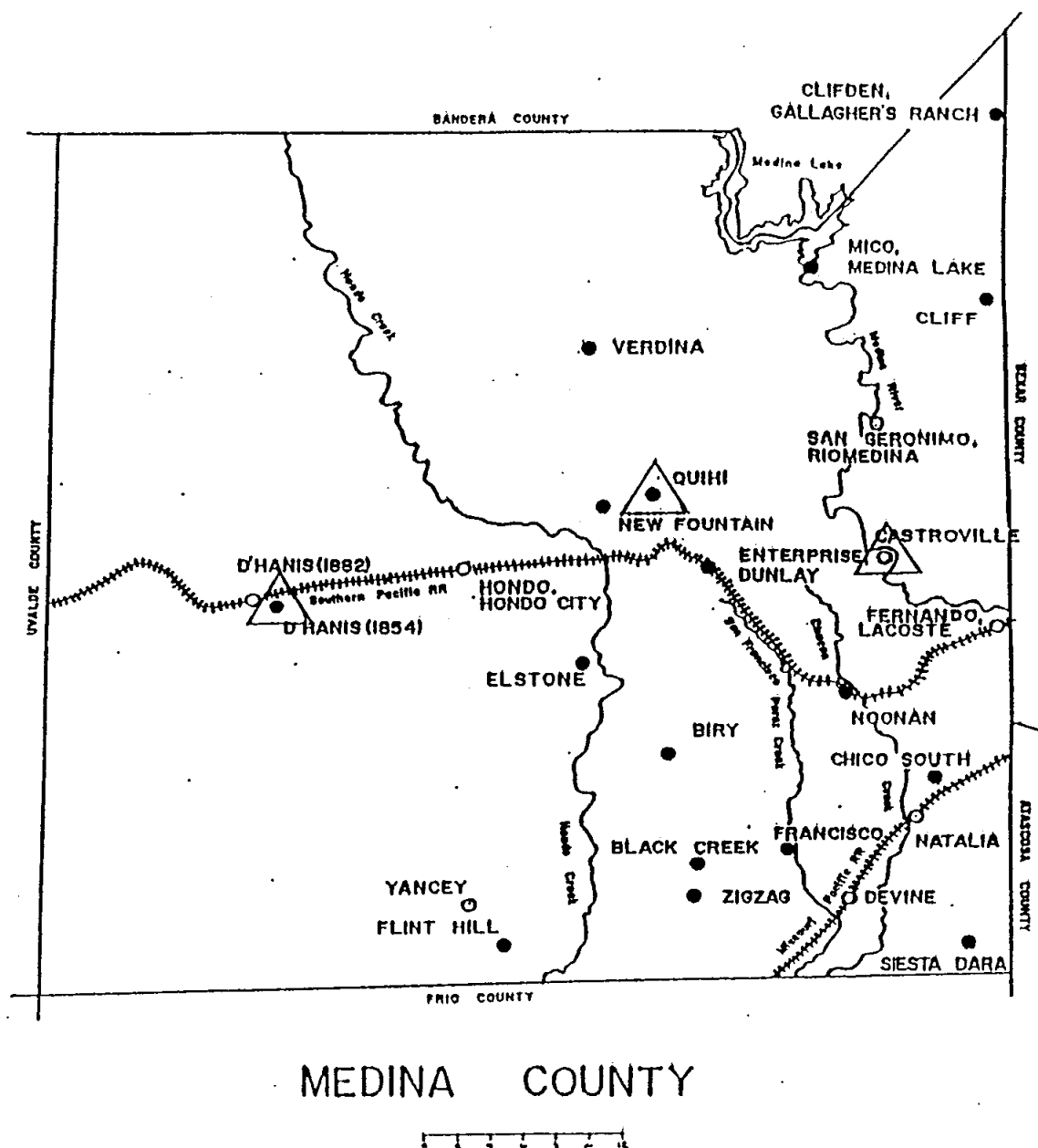


Figure 1. Triangles mark three of the four Medina County communities founded by Empresario Henri Castro in the 1840's. (Courtesy of John Germann and Myron Janzen.)

Henri Castro was a Frenchman, born in France in July 1786 the son of a Portuguese nobleman. After the fall of Napoleon he came to the United States, becoming a naturalized citizen in 1827. In 1838 he returned to France where he subsequently became a partner in a banking firm. With this firm he helped negotiate a loan for the Republic of Texas.

The young republic was hard up for money. For instance, in 1841 the Texas Congress doubled the 1840 postage rates, except for the ship rate which they increased from 6 1/4 cents to 50 cents, in order to create more revenue. It was at this time that Castro was working to expedite a Texas loan. In gratitude for his efforts on Texas' behalf, President Sam Houston appointed Henri Castro consul general for Texas at Paris. Thus Castro's interest in Texas was piqued and in 1842 he contracted with the Republic government for a land grant to colonize an area west of San Antonio on the Medina River.

The town of Castroville is, of course, named for Henri Castro. At the time of its founding on September 3, 1844 Castroville was the westernmost settlement in the Republic of Texas. Between 1844 and 1847 Castro brought to Texas 485 families and 457 single men for a total of 2,134 settlers. All told he chartered twenty-seven ships and spent over \$200,000 of his own money (a lot in those days) in order to provide for his colonists.

After founding Castroville he departed about November 25, 1844 and returned to France to assemble the next group of settlers, arriving in Paris either late 1844 or early 1845. Figure 2 is the address side of a folded letter written in French by Henri Castro at Paris on June 15, 1845.

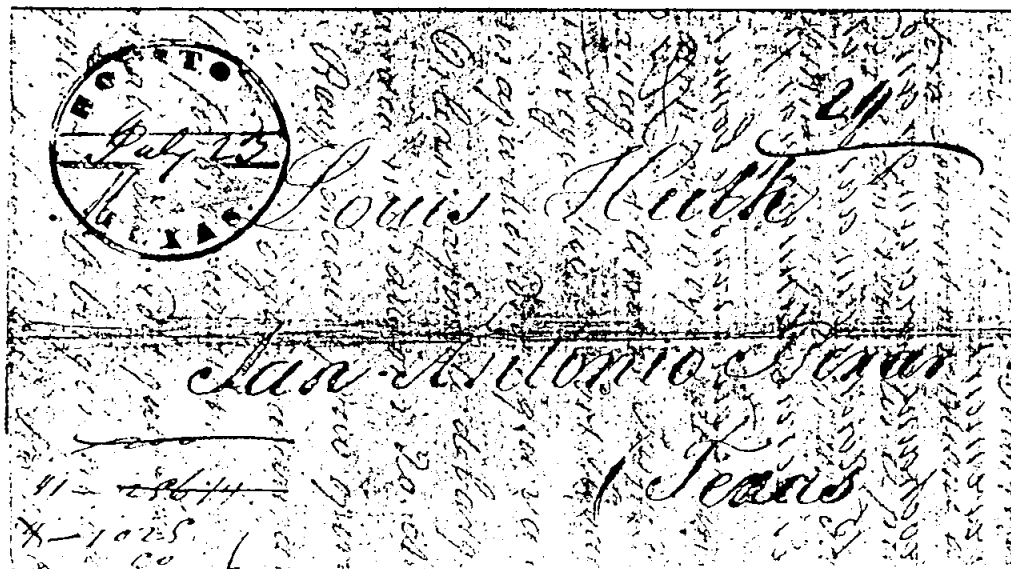


Figure 2. Folded letter written at Paris, France by Henri Castro. The letter was hand carried to Houston where it was posted July 23, 1845 paying 20¢ Texas Republic postage to San Antonio, a distance over 100 miles.

Castro's letter was apparently hand carried to Houston by an unknown party where it was posted July 23 paying 20 cents Republic of Texas postage to San Antonio. The handwriting of the "20" appears to be the same as Castro's, suggesting the letter was probably carried to Houston by someone (possibly named Elliot) acting on his instructions. This tallies with the fact that Castro was a very well-organized individual who knew exactly what he was doing and gave out specific orders as to what he wanted done. This is evident in the content of the letter as reported below.

It is quite natural that a Frenchman would write his letter in French. Castro's friend Louis Huth, the addressee, was a German but evidently a typical European knowledgeable in more than one language. Henri Castro was a highly educated man with beautiful handwriting but with terms of address, possibly common to his day and social standing, that are not so common today. Following is a "free translation" (one that flows as opposed to what would be an awkward word-for-word translation) by Mr. Walter C. Bauer of Houston.

Paris, June 15, 1845

My dear Louis,

In continuation I am privileged by your news since I left Texas. I can explain the silence only by assuming that your letters were intercepted. Change directions and ask Elliot to address them to his correspondent from his side to Messrs. H. C. Cammack at New Orleans. Once they arrive there they are safe. I wrote to you at length by the first class steamer. I repeat my instructions for you. According to my plans I expect to embark with the July 1st steamer on account of Texas' good position. Applications have arrived from entire congregations who wish to emigrate as group to Texas. The condition imposed on me is for me to obtain the desired information by word of mouth. As usual, I sacrifice myself in this circumstance to the interests of the Colony. If I counted less on you, dear Louis, I would be more anxious, but I depend on your good sense to recognize that your arduous work - and mine - to assure forever the happiness of those associated with our undertaking, at the same time proving a noble Independence gloriously achieved. My family absolutely wishes to follow and I am ready to yield to its entreaties because there are 20 other families of financial means and high social standing who wish to follow this example.

On August 15 the first departure will take place with people of choice. The time has finally come for us to accept only those which suit us, therefore this development should encourage you to strive hard the best you can with the present ones. A) With respect to what needs to be done: I can only repeat my numerous instructions to you. I have reread them and find them to be adapted to B) the circumstances, except for local incidents for which you are the best judge. But do not lose sight of that it is necessary to push forward, and by not overly concentrating, occupy the(illegible), and, if possible, EAST of the RIO GRANDE. In placing you as my worthy representative in these difficult circumstances you now find yourself earning a glorious title and success will make your fortune. Tomorrow I leave for Germany. In passing through NEUFREYSTAEDT I will see and stay with your family at least two days, as usual. You can tell in advance that your name will be frequently mentioned in the talks they will avidly have with me and that you will be the principal.....since we were not separated a single day from July 1 to November 25. I organize the means of transportation as follows: The emigrants will pay their crossing from ANTWERP to CASTRO-VILLE. The vessels will be directed to PORT LAVACA where we will have a lighter which will belong to us. It is being purchased in NEW ORLEANS in order to facilitate the landing of our people. At LAVACA we will have 20 carts, with 2 pairs of oxen for each one to harness in order to handle the transport; you will be in charge to organize it with an aide who will meet you there with the necessary funds.

The confirmation of the credit which I opened with Elliot did not leave until today which forces me to tell him to delay until the 12th or 15th of June issuing the draft, if it has not already been done. Two sureties (to stand behind them) are better than one; you know how timid I am regarding financial matters since we are so far apart. Just between us, there is some consolation in the absence of news; I am convinced that nothing better could be done than what you are accomplishing. From your side you have this assurance a hundred fold. In this confidence rests the success at the distance we are. A credit of several thousand Piastres C) will be placed at New Orleans.

The letters by Mr. Janner (?) and everybody express the truth - here is our strength against the envious and spiteful people. Share this letter with APPLES and BOURGEVES. I write today to the first one in connections with family matters which interest him keenly.

Adieu. My next one will be of great interest since I believe that after August 15 we will have ONE SHIP EACH WEEK (emphasis added by translator). This success will not surprise you since you know me.

All the best to you in good and solid friendship.

(s) H. Castro

Castro recruited his colonists in the province of Alsace on the French-German border. While most of the settlers were French, many German families are known to have settled in Castro's colony. He mentions in the letter visiting Louis Huth's family in Neufreystaedt, a small German community very likely near the border. Also note in the first part of the letter Henri Castro refers to applications from "entire congregations". This is apparently a reference to the fact that his recruits were mostly French Huguenots (Protestants) who were fleeing from a predominantly Roman Catholic area.

According to the letter, Castro planned to depart with the next group of colonists on August 15 (1845). Thus, this letter and the plans he enumerates to his associate Louis Huth are for the establishment of the next settlement, Quihi, laid out on Quihi Lake in 1845. The town was named after the white-necked Mexican eagle buzzard, the Quichie.

The village of Quihi had a post office between 1854 and 1857 when it was discontinued. The Figure 1 map shows Quihi and New Fountain to be separate communities but the postal record indicates they were one and the same. The Quihi post office became New Fountain P. O. in 1857 and remained so until 1871 when it was again called Quihi. However, in 1872 the name was changed back to New Fountain and remained so until permanently closed in 1914. Incidentally, Castro's next colony (1846) at Vandenburg never had a post office and apparently didn't last long. Early maps show it northwest of Quihi but late 19th century maps don't show any such community.

Finally, the subject letter by Texas Republic Empresario Henri Castro is an important artifact of the early Texas historical scene describing details of the planning which led to the founding of a Texas community. Lot 117 in Robt. A. Siegel Auction Galleries' "Camina" sale of February 1994 is another letter addressed to Louis Huth, apparently also in French, which passed through Houston about three weeks earlier. The handwriting is different indicating

someone other than Henri Castro is the author. Wouldn't it be nice to integrate these two missives for a more complete postal history story!

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Texas State Historical Association, The Handbook of Texas, Austin, 1952, Vols I and II.

Schmidt, Walter G., An Encyclopedia of Texas Post Offices, The Collectors Club of Chicago, 1993.

Germann, John J. and Janzen, Myron, Texas Post Offices by County, a current study originating in Houston.

Bauer, Walter C., Houston, Texas, Translator of the subject letter from French to English.

* * * * *

Lyle Boardman - Philatelic Biography

My philatelic biography started when I was 11 years old and was given a small paper stamp album and some stamps by my grandmother. Over the years, I focused on US, UN, Canada and Germany. In the seventies, I discovered souvenir cards produced by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. They had what looked like proofs of stamps on them and were beautiful. That interest has led to a collection of engravings by the BEP and the American Bank Note Company. I am currently working on a collection of proofs of the first, second and third US Revenue issues.

I have been active in organized philately since joining the Austin Texas Stamp Club in 1975. I have held nearly every office in the club since then, and am currently treasurer. I am also treasurer of the Texas Philatelic Association. I am a charter member of the Texas Postal History Society and am a member of the American Philatelic Society, the American Revenue Association, the Souvenir Card Collectors Society, the Germany Philatelic Society, the Bureau Issues Association, the United Postal Stationery Society, and the Americana Unit of the ATA.

For several years, I have been the cachet chairman for the Austin Stamp Show, and have worked with the US Postal Service assisting them and other organizations in designing cachets and cancels for various events, including a series of covers related to the Texas Statehood events this year and next.

FORT DAVIS

1854 - 1891

By William H. P. Emery

In the 1840's, West Texas was a vast stretch of wilderness, only occasionally traversed by white men. It was so barren and devoid of water that most Texans displayed little interest in the country west of the Pecos River. Except for a few Mescalero Apaches who had villages in the Davis Mountains, most Indians avoided the area as well.

However, in September each year, the area resounded to the thundering hoofbeats of Indian mustangs on the Great Commanche War Trail. More than a trail, this area was a broad highway stretching from Oklahoma, through West Texas, into northern Mexico. September came to be known as the "Comanche Moon" and in Mexico it was a time of terror. Apaches, Kiowas, and Comanches, came like a great red tide, down the Comanche War Trail, seeking slaves and horses. They killed, plundered, and burned anything that stood in their way. Mexicans were ill-equipped to protect themselves against so savage a foe.

In 1848, two events conspired to change the course of history. On January 24, 1848 gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill in California and before the year was done a full scale "Gold Rush" was underway.

The second event occurred on February 2, 1848, when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed. One of its provisions obligated the United States Government to protect Mexico from the marauding American Indians.

Partly to live up to their treaty obligations, and partly to protect the hordes of gold seekers who were traveling the Southern Overland Route to California, the United States Army began to establish military posts across the Southwest Frontier. In Texas alone, from 1848-1859, twenty-four military posts were established and staffed by the U.S. Army.

Fort Davis, one of these Army posts, was established in 1854 by Lt. Colonel Washington Seawell with his command of six companies of the 8th Infantry. He located this outpost in Limpia Canyon at the edge of the Davis Mountains. The structures they built were temporary, being of pine and cottonwood slabs, thatched over with grass. Each structure was 56 feet long by 20 feet wide. Later in 1856, six stone barracks with thatched roofs and flagstone floors were erected just west of the wooden structures. Finally, there was a bakehouse a blacksmith shop and a warehouse of stone. All the remaining structures were little more than huts with thatched or canvas roofs and glazed windows.

The purpose of Fort Davis was to protect the El Paso - San Antonio road and to control the Indians who roamed within patrol distance of the fort. With mounted infantry and foot soldiers they were rarely able to catch the Indians. Instead it appears they harrassed them enough that the Indians withdrew northward away from the area. The El Paso - San Antonio road became reasonably safe in the vicinity of the fort.

The first contract for transporting the U.S. Mail between San Antonio and El Paso was awarded on a monthly basis to veteran stage operator Henry Skillman in 1850. He continued to operate this line, with extended service to Santa Fe, until well into the 1850's.

In 1857, James Birch was awarded a U.S. Postal contract for semi-monthly service from San Antonio, via Fort Davis to El Paso, Fort Yuma and on to San Diego. The service was increased to weekly service in 1858. The same year, the famous Butterfield Overland Mail stages, covering a route from St. Louis to San Franscisco were initiated. These stages of the Southern Overland Mail stopped at Fort Davis from 1859 - 1861.

While the troops stationed at Fort Davis kept the road between San Antonio and El Paso open, stages and individual travelers were continually subject to Indian attacks at various points along the road.

Meanwhile, by 1857 most of the wooden buildings at Fort Davis had deteriorated badly. These buildings formed of unseasoned, green slabs, warped, shrunk and rotted. The hospital which was held together by wooden pins, because the supply of nails had run out, became very rickety and in danger of collapsing. Houses for the officers, the quartermaster testified, were altogether very uncomfortable and insufficient quarters.

Thus when the Texas State Commissioners, in 1861, demanded the surrender of Federal military property and the withdrawal of Federal troops, the usefulness of the first Fort Davis (1854-1861) was near its end. Confederate troops occupie^d the post briefly from June to August 1861. It was then abandoned; being practically dismantled in the succeeding years, by Indians and travellers to that area of West Texas.

During the Civil War, and for two years thereafter, the passage through West Texas lay exposed to Commanche and Apache raiders. The Indians took advantage, in the absence of military troops, to lay waste to the land and anyone who tried to cross the area was subject to Indian attack. It is reported that "the mails were robbed; and in one or two instances the stage passengers were found hanging by their heels, their heads within a few inches of a slow fire, which had roasted them to death."

Attacks on frontier settlements, as well as on travelers on the San Antonio - El Paso road, finally brought about reactivation of the frontier defense system. On June 29, 1867, four troops of the regiment under Lt. Col. Wesley Merritt, marched into the old Fort Davis in Limpia Canyon. Seeing that the old fort was totally destroyed and not in the most strategic location, he obtained permission to build a new fort at the mouth of Limpia Canyon.

The new Fort Davis was initially planned to be built of stone, but it turned out that most of the structures in the new fort were constructed of adobe bricks made by Mexican laborers who lived near the site. In the original plan, there were to be 19 sets of officers quarters with separate kitchen buildings facing a 500-foot parade ground. Across the parade ground there were to be six barracks for the non-commissioned troopers. On either end of the parade ground there were to be various offices and other utility buildings filling in the square. See Fig. 1.

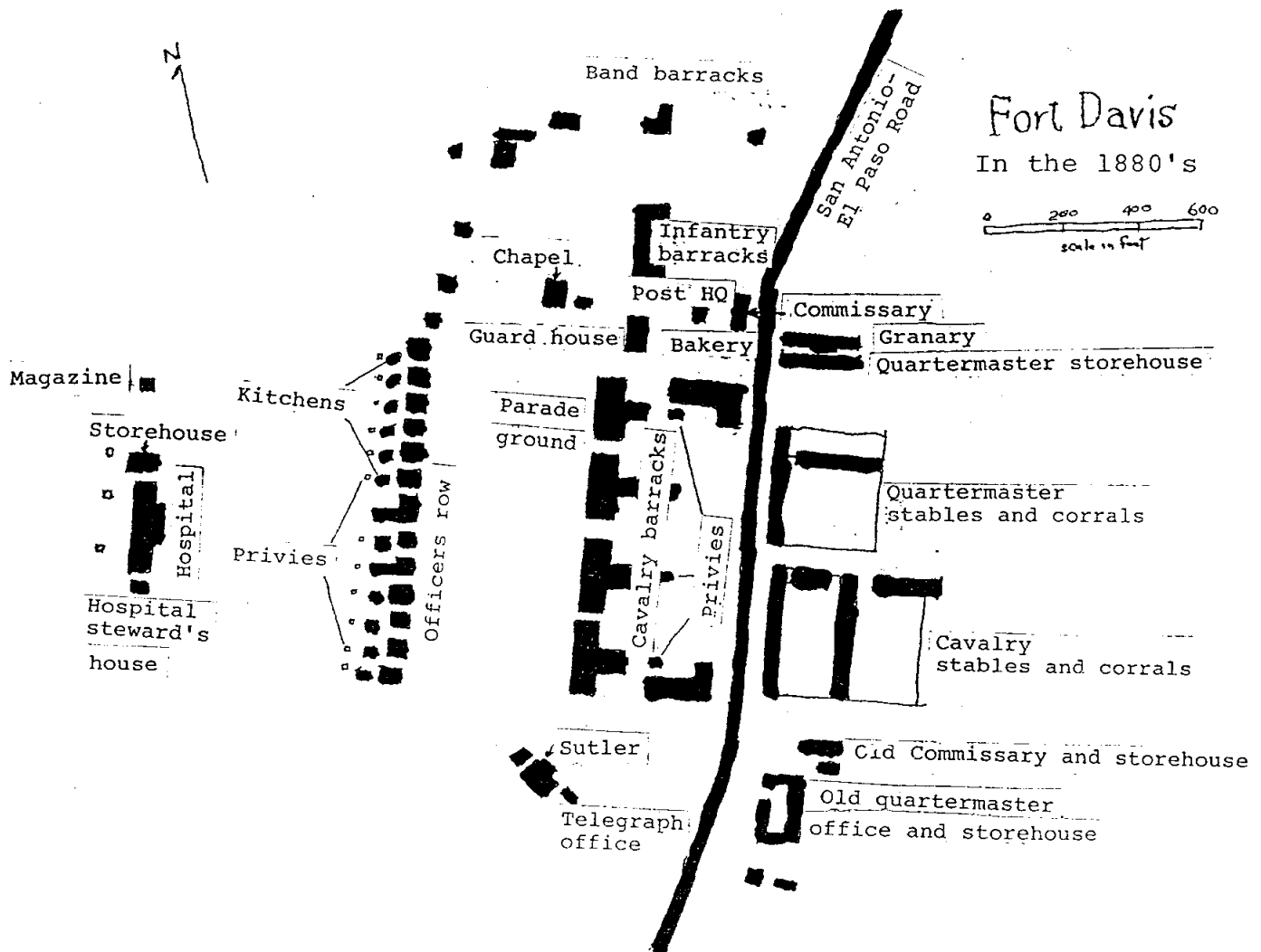


Figure 1

It was from 1867 to 1881 that Fort Davis saw its most active military operations. These were largely carried out by four regiments, all negro with white officers - the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry. The Indians, observing the kinky hair of the troops, dubbed them "Buffalo Soldiers". Most of the senior officers who commanded these troops were capable professionals who were veterans of the Civil War. Notable among the Commanding Officers at Fort Davis were Lt. Col. Wesley Merritt, Bvt. Maj. Gen. Edward Hatch, Lt. Col. William R. Shafter, Maj. Zenas R. Bliss, Col. George L. Andrews and Bvt. Maj. Gen. Benjamin H. Grierson.

In 1879 the Mescalero Apaches mounted an aggressive campaign to save their homeland. Gen. Grierson in command of the 10th Cavalry, responded by blanketing West Texas with a series of subposts, stationing small units to watch all the springs and water holes, while protecting the mail route and travelers. By 1880, General Grierson's effective forays put an end to Indian troubles in West Texas.

Figure 2 shows a cover mailed to Gen. Grierson, postmarked March 11, 1882, and addressed to his headquarters at Fort Concho, from Fort Davis. The stamp is "socked-on-the-nose" by a large five-pointed star.

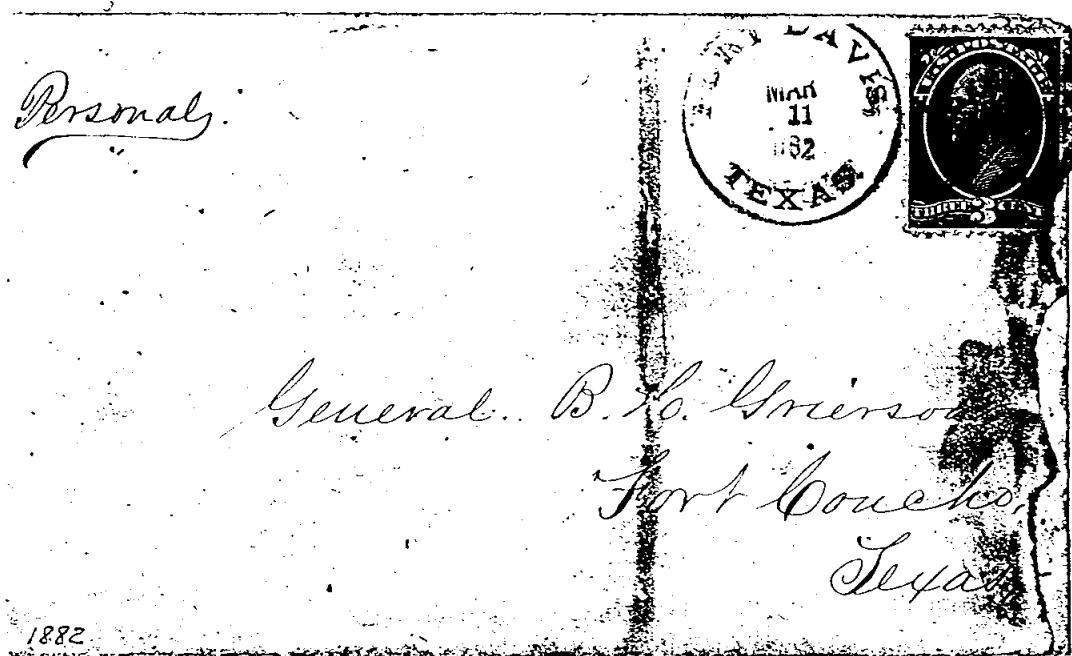


Figure 2

Figure 3 illustrates a second cover from the Grierson correspondence with a strong strike of the Fort Davis triple circle postmark, dated Oct. 18, 1882. This cover is addressed to Gen. Grierson, at Jacksonville, Illinois. It seems apparent that following his successful

campaign against the Indians, he took a little time off to return to visit with relatives and friends in Illinois.

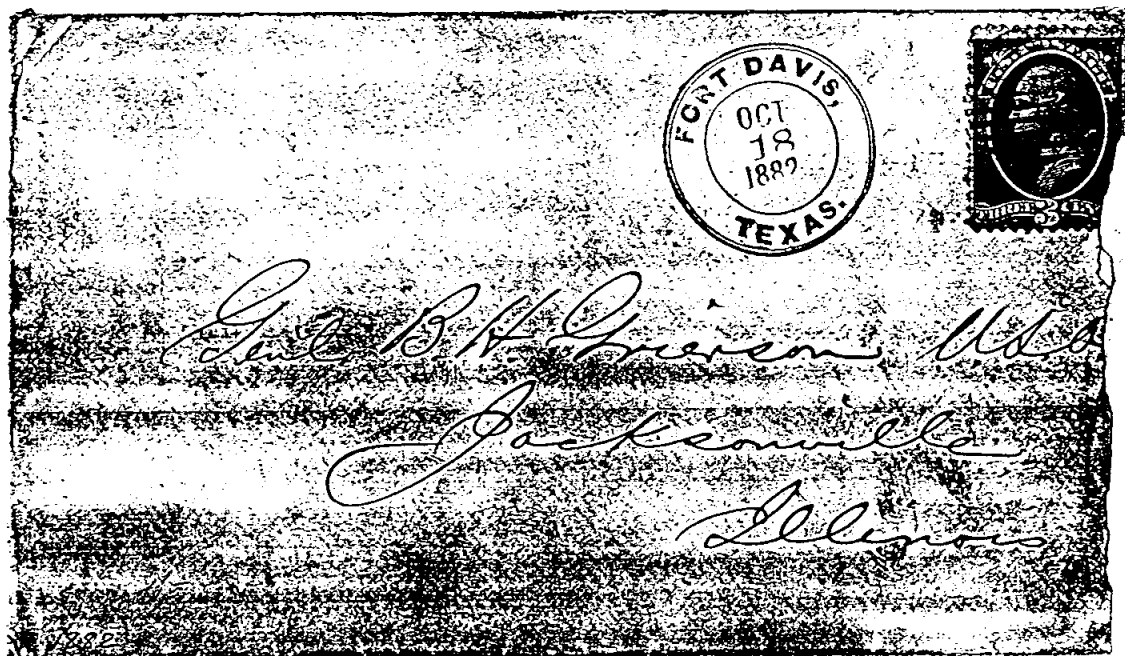


Figure 3

Thus from 1881, to the closing of Fort Davis in 1891, the frontier of West Texas was free of Indian troubles. Large numbers of cattlemen moved into the area and the southern overland route became a safe highway for travelers between San Antonio and El Paso.

* * * * *

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