

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC  
**Fort Washita**  
AND/OR COMMON  
**Fort Washita**

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER  
**Route 199**  
CITY, TOWN  
**Durant** VICINITY OF **3rd**  
STATE **Oklahoma** CODE **40** COUNTY **Bryan** CODE **013**

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME  
**Oklahoma Historical Society**  
STREET & NUMBER  
**Willey Pase Historical Building**  
CITY, TOWN  
**Oklahoma City** VICINITY OF **Oklahoma** STATE

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, COUNTY CLERK  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. **Bryant County Courthouse**  
STREET & NUMBER  
**4th and Evergreen**  
CITY, TOWN  
**Durant** STATE  
**Oklahoma 74701**

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE  
**None**  
DATE  
\_\_\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_\_ LOCAL  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS  
CITY, TOWN STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Fort Washita situated at the mouth of the Washita River was created as a protection for the "civilized" Chickasaws and Choctaws from the more violent Plains Indians. Established in 1842, Fort Washita was an impressive facility constructed of logs and limestone quarried nearby. After the fort was abandoned in 1865, it was left to the ravages of nature. There were left, however, several stone foundations which for years were prominent landmarks to local historians and farmers of Bryan County. (See accompanying photos #2 and #4).

The original fortification was a massive expanse of over seven square miles containing far more than ninety buildings and sites. Of these, some 48 structures of various degrees of importance have been located and identified. However, there is very little above ground. For many structures all that remain are scattered stones. In other cases, such as the kitchen and the rows of bake ovens, sites are clearly marked and the foundations are quite evident (see accompanying photograph #8). Other foundations are located throughout the Fort Washita Park and there are a constant number of visitors who use the facility. There are two cemeteries located at the post. The Post Cemetery (photo #6) located on the north side of the park and the confederate cemetery located on the west side on the road to Government springs. When Fort Washita was abandoned in 1865, the bodies from the post cemetery were exhumed and reburied at Fort Gibson.

Fort Washita today has been made to look typical of what most erroneously expect to see of a western fort. The original fort, because of its tremendous size was without stockade. In the restoration, however, the Oklahoma Historical Society has built a "modern" entrance gate with stockade and blockhouse (see accompanying photograph # 9).

When the property to Fort Washita was acquired by the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1962, a mammoth plan for the complete restoration of the fort was presented. This plan soon gave way to the more practical prospects of restoration of several of the more outstanding buildings and marking of other sites. One of the most impressive of the restorations is that of the South Barracks. For many years the South Barracks had been left idle and at one time had been used as a cattle stable (see accompanying photo #2). The South Barracks has now practically been completely restored (see photograph #1). A two-story building, the first floor is constructed of stone while the second is frame. There is an extended roofline porch. This two story porch completely encircles the buildings, while the second floor from both the north and south facades of the building. There is a stone walkway around the lower level and the interior floors on the first story are of like stone. Though work is not yet complete this will prove to be a most impressive interpretive facility.

A short distance west of the South Barracks is the remains of the West Barracks. A two-story stone structure, much of the building has been lost to both the forces of nature as well as the efforts of locals to preserve the remains. Though much of the original masonry remains, much has been cemented over. On the south end of the building is the original well which still maintains a high level of water. Water from this well was originally used at the wash house located a few feet on the west side of the West Barracks. Buttresses have been placed on the interior of the

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1842

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Established at the mouth of the Washita River in 1842, Fort Washita, the westernmost United States fort at the time of its construction, represented an advance of the frontier from the Forts Gibson-Towson line. Fort Washita was founded as a result of treaty commitments to protect the Chickasaws and Choctaws from the more violent western plains tribes. The post was perhaps even more important, however, because of its location. Reportedly chosen by General Zachary Taylor, the strategic site of Fort Washita, after the Mexican War, became an important way station for immigrants and traders enroute to Texas, as well as to California via the Marcy Trail. The United States abandoned the fort in 1861, but Confederate troops reoccupied and held it throughout the war. It was not used after 1865.

Noted post commanders of Fort Washita included Thomas T. Fauntleroy, William S. Harney, Dixon S. Miles and Braxton Bragg; Confederate Generals S. B. Maxey and Albert Pike were associated with the fort during the Civil War. General William G. Belknap (father of the Secretary of War under President Grant) died near there in 1851 and was buried in the post cemetery.

After almost a century of sitting abandoned, Fort Washita was acquired by the Oklahoma Historical Society in 1962. A massive program of preservation and restoration was then begun. Located on State Route 199 three miles from its intersection with State Route 78 in Bryan County, Fort Washita today is an attractive State Park open to the public throughout the year.

### History

As a result of constant agitation by white settlers, and the powerful aid of President Andrew Jackson, Congress enacted the Indian Removal Bill of 1830. This act authorized the relocation of Indian nations from their homelands east of the Mississippi to the Indian Territory west of the 95th meridian. There, beyond the "permanent" Indian frontier, these civilized tribes could pursue their way of life.

These new lands acquired by the Chickasaws bordered with two striking nemeses, the Plains Indians and the whites of the new Texas Republic. Renegade bands of Kickapoo, Osage, Delaware and Pawnee squatted in the most desirable locations. Flotsam of previous removals, these tribes were as tough and predatory as the Comanche and Kiowa. Then too, Texas citizens made no distinction between the more passive Indians of the eastern reservations and the warlike Plains Indians. In retaliation for frequent raids by war parties who crossed the Chickasaw District to gain entry into Texas, the people of that Republic often expended their wrath on the

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Foreman, Grant, Advancing the Frontier (Norman, Oklahoma, 1933).  
 Morrison, W. B., Military Posts and Camps in Oklahoma (Oklahoma City, 1936).  
 \_\_\_\_\_, "Fort Washita," Chronicles of Oklahoma, Vol. V (1928).  
 WPA, Oklahoma Guide, (Norman, 1945).

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 117

UTM REFERENCES

A	14	726600	3776550	B	14	726600	3775900
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	14	725750	3775680	D	14	725760	3776530
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

From the intersection of the east fence and Route 199, proceed in a northerly direction along the fence approximately 2,125 feet, thence proceed west 2,125 feet, thence proceed south to a point of intersection with Route 199, thence proceed east along the north side of Route 199 to the point of origin. This boundary encompasses approximately 117 acres. Within this boundary are all of the extant structures and identified sites of Fort Washita.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Joseph Scott Mendinghall--Historian

9-2-76

ORGANIZATION National Park Service, Historic Sites

DATE

Survey

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1100 L Street NW

523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Washington, D.C.

20240

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL     

STATE     

LOCAL     

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

Landmark  
 Designated JUNE 23, 1965  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 State Historic Preservation Officer

TITLE

DATE JUNE 28, 1978

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 11/24/78

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
 ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

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building to support aging walls. The fireplace on the south side of the building has been repointed.

Throughout Fort Washita Park are redwood markers locating various points of interest. Some of these include the lime pit where mortar was made for the construction of the buildings, a water trough which ran from the well to the wash houses, the bake oven, the remains of the original corral, and an old one-story cabin believed to have been occupied by General Cooper.

An observation tower rises high above the park and gives the visitor a panoramic birds eye view of the countryside for miles.

There has also been built on the fort grounds a one-story stone building which serves as visitors center as well as the home for the caretaker of the property. Upon the completion of the South barracks, all fort related activity will be removed from the caretakers house.

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CONTINUATION SHEET      Significance      Fort Washita      ITEM NUMBER      8      PAGE      2

peaceful Chickasaws. Bandits and outlaws were a constant threat and the Chickasaws lived in constant fear and anxiety.

Finally on April 23, 1842, after four years of proding by both General Taylor, and the Indian nations, Fort Washita was finally occupied under the command of Captain G. A. H. Blake. Fort Washita immediately assumed significance, not only as the most westerly military post on the Indian frontier, but, by virtue of its strategic location at the crossroads to Texas and the plains, as an advance listening post providing contact and communication with the vast western country.

Shielded by Fort Washita, the Chickasaws settled in large numbers in the fertile valleys of the Blue, Washita, and Boggy Rivers. Traders set up shop in the area and steamships made the run from Fort Towson Landing up the Red and Washita to within a mile of the Fort. Meanwhile, Harney's dragoons and infantry guarded the Civilized Tribes, engaging in numerous punitive forays and reconnaissance into the plains to impress the nomadic plains Indians.

After the Mexican War and Cession, Fort Washita declined as a tactical military post. But in the era of exploration and exploitation of the newly acquired Southwest area that followed, it became an outfitting and departure point of note.

Between 1849 and 1852 Captain Randolph B. Marcy used it as his base on several expeditions, ~~Fort Washita~~, which led to the development of the southern overland route, Marcy's Trail.

In 1850-51 Marcy was ordered to reconnoiter the Texas-Oklahoma frontier to select sites for a string of military posts that would protect advancing settlers from the Plains Indians. This led directly to the establishment of Fort Arbuckle, Indian Territory and Fort Belknap, Texas, the first links in the chain of fortifications that eventually stretched from the Red River to El Paso. Marcy's expeditions were based at Fort Washita, as was Brigadier General William G. Belknap's reconnaissance, which confirmed Marcy's selection of sites later occupied by Forts Belknap, Phantom Hill, and others. Later in 1851 General Belknap died on the way from the Brazos to Fort Washita. He was buried in the post cemetery and though his body was later removed, his gravestone remains.

Marcy's greatest exploration, the discovery of the headwaters of Red River in 1852, was again based at Fort Washita. Since 1806 numerous expeditious had attempted to unravel the mystery of Red River's source. All had failed. Marcy succeeded. The geographic significance of his discoveries was great, opening up and mapping the last great tierra incognita of the Southern Plains.

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But just as Fort Washita reached its highpoint as a permanent garrison post, its military function transferred westward as the frontier moved. Except for a skeleton force, it was abandoned in 1858. Then, with secession looming, it was reoccupied in December of that year by the First Infantry. As the North-South division widened, Fort Washita on the Texas Road again became strategic.

In early spring 1861 Lt. Colonel William H. Emory was ordered to concentrate army units in Indian Territory at Fort Washita to repel a threatened movement from Texas. But the pro-Southern sympathies of the Choctaws and Chickasaws and Fort Washita's isolation from the other Federal posts and supply centers combined to make the position untenable. On April 17, 1861, Federal troops were ordered to evacuate Indian Territory. Emory abandoned Fort Washita on April 30, and the next day the Texas militia under Colonel William C. Young moved in. Fort Washita was never again occupied by United States troops.

During the Civil War, Fort Washita served the Confederacy as supply post and communications link and in the latter days, as headquarters of the Confederate District of Indian Territory.

Though no battles occurred at Fort Washita, throughout its existence it exerted a great influence on western expansion and in protecting the welfare of the Indians.