

# FORT SELDEN

## HISTORIC SITE

Experience Fort Selden Historic Site and more than 1400 years of history!

Fort Selden has a long and colorful history. As early as 400 A.D. Native American foragers and farmers, the Mogollon, lived and prospered on the same land that would become Fort Selden centuries later. The Mogollon lived in earthen pit houses throughout the Southwest borderlands near primary trade routes that connected central Mexico with the lands to the north. By the 1400s the Mogollon disappeared from the region blending with pueblo tribes in New Mexico's interior.

In 1598, the Spanish formally established El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (The Royal Road to the Interior) using ancient Native American trade routes. The trail, 1,500 miles long, extended from Mexico City to Ohkay Owingeh in the north. Along the route, campsites called *parajes* were very important to travelers as they provided resting places for people and animals, sources of water and firewood, and game and fish for food. Fort Selden was originally built on or near one of these campsites, Paraje de Robledo, an important stop where travelers could refresh themselves before entering a treacherous 90-mile stretch north that became known as the *Jornada del Muerto*, or the Journey of Death.



In 1848, New Mexico formally became a United States territory. With the new government came more settlers further encroaching into the traditional homelands of the Apache leading to a worsening of hostilities that had been increasing throughout the 19th century. In an effort to bring peace to the region, the U.S. government established Fort Selden in April 1865. The New Mexico Volunteers and troops from California constructed the adobe buildings. For 25 years, about 1800 soldiers were stationed there protecting settlers from Native American raiding and general lawlessness, and escorted travelers throughout the New Mexico Territory.

A soldier's life in a small western fort was not easy. It comprised of long period of tedious monotony with brief moments of conflict. Overall, the pursuit of entertainment cost more lives than any enemy. In those 25 years, only three soldiers died in combat.

Several of the units that served here were African American-only regiments referred to as Buffalo Soldiers. Their tenacity in a fight gained the fear and respect of the Apache from which their name originates. Buffalo Soldiers performed many vital roles at Fort Selden including escort duty, scouting local terrain, and tracking reported raiders as well as fighting in combat zones.

In the late 1880s, Arthur MacArthur, a Civil War veteran and recipient of the nation's highest military distinction, the Medal of Honor, was post commander. His young son Douglas lived at Fort Selden with his father and family. He later came to fame as a general in World War II, also receiving the Medal of Honor. Fort Selden was abandoned in 1891 as hostilities lessened and the needs of the military changed.

In honor of his father's wishes, Harry Bailey Jr. donated the land today known as Fort Selden Historic Site to the State of New Mexico in several parcels of land between 1970 and 1990. The Fort was dedicated as a State Monument on July 2, 1973.

Today, ghostly adobe ruins are all that remains of Fort Selden offering visitors a glimpse of another time. The visitor center offers exhibits on frontier and military life and showcases historic military artifacts and photos. As one of eight historic sites in New Mexico, Fort Selden plays an important cultural, historical, and educational role in presenting the history of New Mexico.

