



Fort Selden, circa 1870.

Fort Selden was established in 1865 to help bring peace to the region. For twenty-five years about 1,800 soldiers were stationed there. Several of the units that served were African-American only regiments referred to as “Buffalo Soldiers.” Life at the Fort was challenging but the soldiers, officers, and their families looked forward to holiday celebrations. Though we don’t have historic documents describing the details from Fort Selden, we do have examples from other frontier forts that tell us how impressive the holiday preparations could be.

The 1883 holiday at Fort Davis, in West Texas, was described in this way:

“A number of pleasant diversions have occurred with the post during the holiday week, the most noticeable of which were the dinner and ball given by Troop B, Tenth Cavalry, on Christmas. The menu for dinner was:

Tomato soup, soda and oyster crackers, egg-nog. Meats—Roasted pigs, baked pork, roast venison and antelope; roasted turkey and chicken stuffed with giblets, with celery dressing; boiled ham, ham sandwiches. Vegetables—Baked potato, corn, tomatoes, macaroni. Salads—Potato salad, chicken salad, celery salad. Relishes—Celery, water cress, pickles, mustard, canned apples, current jelly, cranberry sauces, marmalade. Desserts—Apples, pears, peaches, oranges, bananas, pine apple, pumpkin, and apple pies; wine and lemon jellies, cocoanut, jelly, pound and fruit cakes; coffee, tea, cigars.

Among many other things constituting the courses and of which we have not have the space to notice were an abundance of nice butter and city baked bread. We cannot, however, but notice the beautifully decorated dining room, the elegant tableware, viz: seventy-two silver plated quart bowls, plated knives, forks, and spoons, six-bottle castors, six pickle quadruple plate. The tables, five in number, were each sixteen feet long, covered by exquisite red and white table cloths. Two beautiful Christmas trees laden with every variety of fruits, &c., added very materially to the decorations of the room. The dining room was visited by the officers and ladies of the post with their friends, all of whom joining in complimenting the energy of troop B in preparing such a bountiful and luxurious repast, after which the troop, with its many invited guests, did ample justice to the occasion.”

From *The Army and Navy Register*, January 26, 1884.