

Fort Lowell

Fort Lowell had its beginning within the eastern side of El Presidio, which is now the southwest corner of Church Avenue and Washington Street. Fragments of the original structure have been restored at that location. The Spanish established the presidio, a fortified camp, in 1775 to protect the settlers from the Indians. In 1821 the newly independent Mexican army took charge. During the Mexican-American War in 1846, the first American troops arrived at the Tucson army post. They were known as the Mormon Battalion and lay siege to El Presidio, but only stayed four days, enroute from Iowa to California. Two years later the Dragoons, a cavalry unit led by Maj. Lawrence Graham stayed briefly enroute from Mexico to California. After the Gadsden Purchase of 1854, the Mexican army remained until 1856 and then left when four companies of 1st United States Dragoons arrived to take over operations at the presidio. It wasn't long however, before the troops were required back east to help fight the Civil War. The Union Army had departed Tucson by the end of 1861 and on 24 February 1862, confederate soldiers occupied Tucson. This occupation by the Confederacy only lasted until 14 May when the Confederate Cavalry withdrew rather than face the superior Union Cavalry of the California Volunteers.

The United States Army sent Capt. Jonathan Hafer, Company G, 14th US Infantry to assume command of the post in March of 1866 and the camp remained at the downtown location until 1873. Next in command was a Cavalry leader, Lt. Charles Veil. He named the Post for 6th U.S. Cavalry Brigadier General Charles Russell Lowell, who died in the Civil War. The Tucson Post was named Camp Lowell and in 1879 was declared a fort, which gave the post a more permanent status. As early as 1865 Papago Indians, now known as the Tohono O'odham, provided warriors in retaliation for the Apaches stealing their horses and cattle. Twenty Papago scouts were stationed at the camp.

Fort Lowell moved to its present site on Rillito Creek, seven miles northeast of downtown Tucson in 1873. The old post was inadequate with dilapidated buildings, a contaminated well and poor sanitation. Malaria was a major problem among the soldiers. From 1873 to 1877 the principal facilities were built at the new site: seven officers' quarters, with furniture transported across the continent; a storehouse, horse barns and corrals, quarters for the band, a parade ground, and a hospital. It became known in the army as a prestigious and desirable station where officers' families were very comfortable. The Fort Lowell band was very popular and gave concerts at the fort and for events in Tucson. The 1880 population of Tucson was 7,007 persons.

Fort Lowell soldiers protected the Tucson citizens from the eastern Apaches. The fort was a major supply depot for other posts. The Geronimo Campaigns kept the soldiers very busy and the Fort was at full capacity. In 1886 it held four companies of the 4th Cavalry and the 8th Infantry with 18 officers and 239 enlisted men. Scout Company D made up of Western Apaches was stationed there when they accompanied the Cavalry on patrols. The Western Apaches were rivals of the Chiricahua Apache tribes and did not identify with their warlike behavior.

The surrender of Geronimo to Brigadier General Nelson A. Miles on Sept 4, 1886 was the end of major activity for the Fort. The fort closed in 1891 and all remaining troops and supplies were transferred to Fort Wingate in New Mexico.

In 1963 the Fort Lowell Museum, a branch of the Arizona Historical Society, opened in a restored commanding officer's quarters in Fort Lowell Park. The area surrounding Fort Lowell Park is included in the National Register of Historic Places. The property on the northwest corner of Fort Lowell and Craycroft that contains an original quartermaster building were purchased by the City of Tucson in 2006. Further plans include developing that fort area along with an adjacent original officer's quarter site to the south, already city-owned.

Prepared by Bette Bosma. 2006. Sources: *Life at Post Fort Lowell, Arizona Territory*, Spring 2002, No. 2. Fort Lowell Museum Pamphlet; websites; visit to Fort Lowell Museum.