

Fort Tejon

STATE HISTORICAL MONUMENT



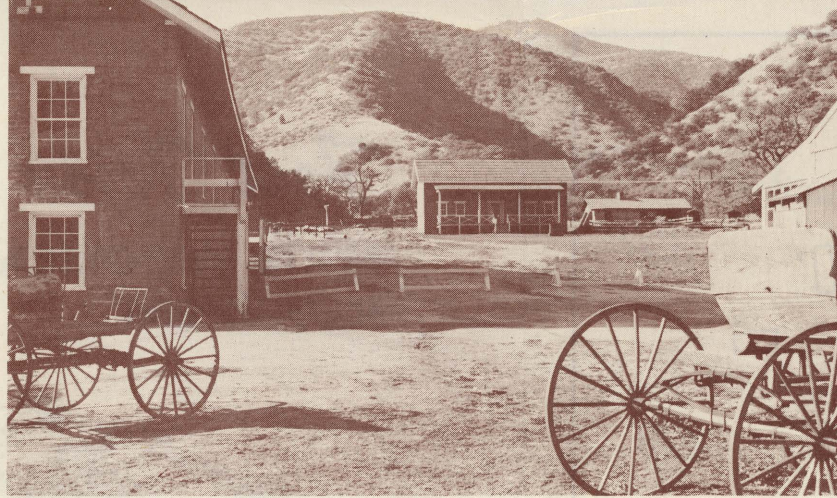
STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF BEACHES AND PARKS

Establishment of Fort Tejon

General Edward Fitzgerald Beale, in his capacity of Commissioner of Indian Affairs for California, had recommended the establishment of a military post about 15 miles southwest of the Sebastian Indian Reservation for the purpose of protecting the friendly Indians in the southern San Joaquin Valley. This particular location was considered advantageous since it strategically controlled an important pass through which stolen horses and cattle from the San Joaquin were driven to markets in the Southwest. The construction of a post on the Fort's present site was authorized June 24, 1854. Six days later detachments of the 1st U.S. Dragoons were ordered to Fort Tejon, which then became regimental headquarters for the Dragoons. Their activities carried them over much of western America. It is an interesting fact that 15 of the officers who served at Fort Tejon during its active period later became generals in the War Between the States. Eight served in the northern forces and seven with the south. After its abandonment by the Army in 1864, Fort Tejon became a part of General Beale's Tejon Ranch property, and the buildings of the post were used as residences, stables and sheds during subsequent years.

In 1939 the State of California acquired through a gift of the Tejon Ranch Company title to five acres on which a number of the Fort's original buildings stood.

Fort Tejon was the chief military, social and political center between the San Joaquin area near Fresno and Los Angeles. At the height of its activity there were over 20 buildings stand-



The Parade Ground



Orderly's Building

ing at the post, and during 1858 a Butterfield Overland Mail Station was established here on the line which extended from St. Louis to San Francisco.

U. S. Army Camel Corps

Under the direction of U.S. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, camels were imported into this country in 1857. The army planned to use them in transporting supplies to isolated posts in the arid southwest, and for patrol use in controlling hostile Indians. A group of 28 camels was marched to Fort Tejon in California from near San Antonio, Texas, during the latter part of this same year. The wagon road survey party to which the camels were attached was under the direction of General Beale. The splendid performance of the camels during this five months trek moved Beale to recommend to the War Department that further camels be purchased. However, various factors tended to discredit widespread use of camels in America. With the outbreak of the War Between the States and the subsequent construction of trans-continental railroads, the camel experiment was

discontinued by the army. Camels in varying numbers were stationed at Fort Tejon from November 1857, until their removal to Los Angeles in June, 1861.

Peter le Beck Tree

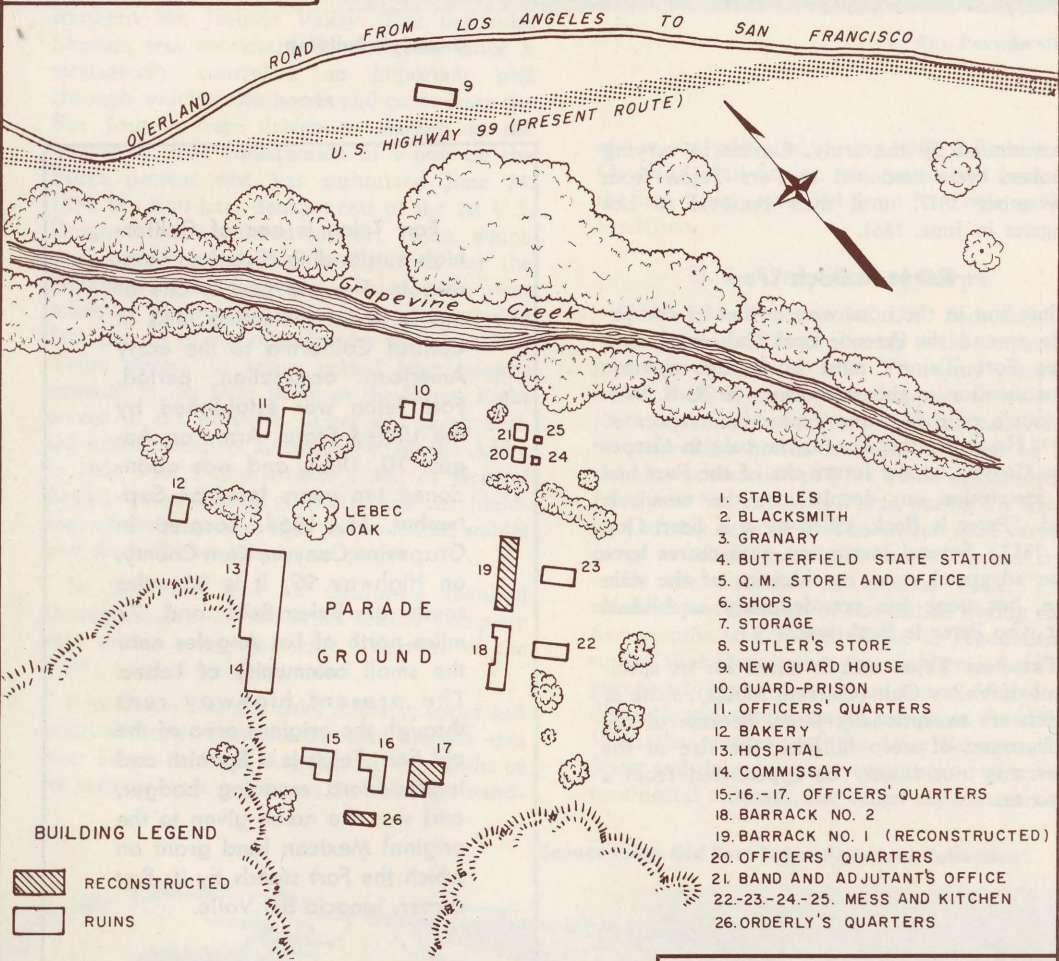
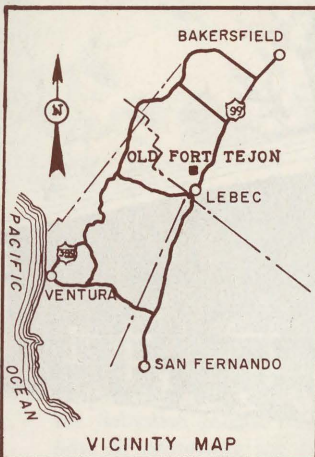
Standing in the northwest corner of the parade ground, the Peter le Beck Oak commemorates Fort Tejon's most intriguing mystery. First mention of this tree occurs in R. S. Williamson's railroad route exploration report of 1853. He wrote that one of the oaks in Grapevine Canyon on the future site of the Fort had an inscription cut deeply into the wood. It read: "Peter le Beck, killed by a X bear, Oct. 17, 1837." Several interesting conjectures have been advanced as to the identity of the slain man, but none has yet definitely established just who Peter le Beck was.

The Fort Tejon area is noted for its specimens of Valley Oak (*Quercus lobata*), some of which are exceptionally large. Because of the background of steep hillsides, the size of the trees may not readily be appreciated from a distance.

Fort Tejon is one of California's outstanding Historical Monuments. The old post is one of the foremost remaining links in Central California to the early American occupation period. Fort Tejon was established by the United States Army on August 10, 1854, and was abandoned ten years later on September 11, 1864. Located in Grapevine Canyon, Kern County, on Highway 99, it is 36 miles south of Bakersfield and 77 miles north of Los Angeles near the small community of Lebec. The present highway runs through the original area of the old Fort. Tejon is a Spanish and Indian word meaning badger, and was the name given to the original Mexican land grant on which the Fort stands by its first owner, Ignacio del Valle.

Scenes From Old Fort Tejon Historical Collection





OLD FORT TEJON

AS IT MAY HAVE APPEARED IN 1854-1864
FROM MANSFIELD SKETCHES

The State Park System holds in trust for generations yet unborn a small but very valuable portion of this state's rich heritage.

Help Keep It Thus.