

Interpretive Guide to:

FORT PARKER

STATE PARK



A CALM LAKE ON THE NAVASOTA RIVER, A QUIET GRAVEYARD FULL OF MEMORIES, SECLUDED SPRINGS GUARDED BY LARGE BUR OAK TREES. ALL OF THESE ARE PART OF THE TRANQUILITY OF FORT PARKER STATE PARK. YET THE PARK ALSO REFLECTS THE CHALLENGES AND CONFLICTS OF THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN LIMESTONE COUNTY DURING THE SETTLEMENT OF THE FRONTIER, THE AFTERMATH OF RECONSTRUCTION AND THE ECONOMIC DEVASTATION OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION.



Veterans of CCC Camp 3807 (C) at a dedication ceremony in 1998.

Camp Mexia closed in January 1942 when the nation's resources were redirected to World War II. Many of the CCC veterans enlisted in the armed forces. Today they return to Fort Parker State Park for annual reunions, celebrating their accomplishments and their camaraderie.

OTHER AREA ATTRACTIONS

Confederate Reunion Grounds State Historic Site - Native Americans, Confederate veterans, oil boom entrepreneurs and local families have gathered at this scenic spot where Jack's Creek enters the Navasota River. Information about this day-use park is available at the Fort Parker State Park office.

Old Fort Parker - Old Fort Parker recreates the stockade built near the Navasota River by the Parker family in 1833. Located on State Highway 14, the park is now operated by the cities of Groesbeck and Mexia and Limestone County.

You can support Fort Parker State Park by joining the friends group or being a park host. Volunteers are needed to help with interpretation, special events and fund-raising. Please contact the park for more information.

Fort Parker State Park
194 Park Road 28
Mexia TX 76667
(254) 562-5751
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/fortpark/



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NATURAL CROSSROADS



Early Mexican land grants described plentiful springs, prairies and woodlands along the Navasota River. With water and timber available, pioneers like the John Parker family claimed the lands at this natural crossroads where the grasses of the blackland prairie mingle

with the woodlands of the post oak savannah. Logs of cedar were stacked and notched, chinked and daubed to make cabins. South of the river, the Parker family built a large stockade to protect their families and livestock.

The area was also a crossroads for Native Americans. The Comanche warriors who ruled the great plains crossed the Navasota River north of here to raid the peaceful Tawakoni Indians farming in the area. On the morning of May 19, 1836, a band of Comanches, Kiowas and Kichais attacked the Parker Fort. Five settlers died and another five were kidnapped, including nine-year-old Cynthia Ann Parker.



SPRINGFIELD

Once a bustling county seat boasting a stage line, college, weekly newspaper and several hotels, the community of Springfield thrived from the 1840s through the 1860s.

But the Civil War changed life in Springfield. Businesses closed as men joined the Confederate army. After local plantation owner Logan Stroud read the Emancipation Proclamation from the steps of his Bur Oak Springs plantation, racial conflicts and martial law plagued the community during the years of Reconstruction. Springfield found new life as a community of African-American freedmen after the railroad bypassed the town for Mexia and Groesbeck.

Today all that remains of Springfield are the springs and the cemetery. Giant bur oaks shade the graves of former Springfield residents including plantation owners, African-American freedmen, and early Texas revolution veterans Sanders Walker and Joseph Penn Lynch.



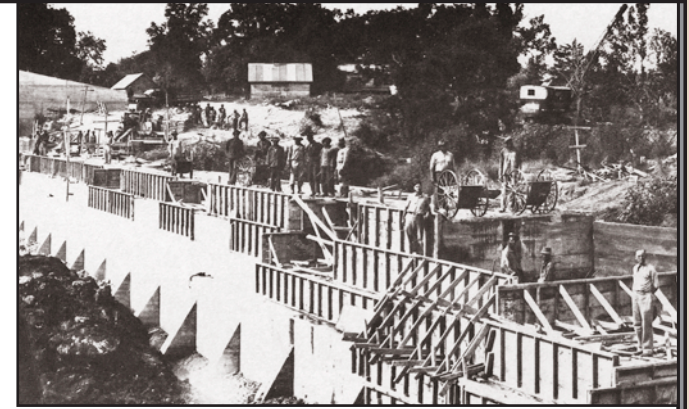
Grave of Logan Stroud's infant daughter, 1861.

CAMP MEXIA

With local economies struggling during the Great Depression, Limestone County businessmen sought a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp to build a recreational park near the historic site of Parker's fort.

The young men of Civilian Conservation Corps Camp 3807 (C) reported to Camp Mexia in July of 1935. The "C" stood for "Colored," and 3807 was one of the first segregated camps of young African-American men. Most of the two hundred young men were from the Limestone County area, many the

◀ The Parker family story is told at the nearby Old Fort Parker Restoration



The young men of Civilian Conservation Corps Camp 3807 (C) built a dam across the Navasota River creating Lake Fort Parker.

sons of sharecroppers struggling to survive in farming communities like Mart and Coolidge, Teague and Springfield. Of the \$30 a recruit earned each month, \$22 was sent home to support his family.

Camp Mexia had its own sawmill and limestone quarry, using local rock and timber to build the park. One of the camp's first projects was building a replica of the Parker stockade and cabins for the Texas Centennial celebration in 1936. Then Camp Mexia work crews tackled one of the most ambitious CCC projects in Texas, building a 423-foot dam of limestone, concrete and earth across the Navasota River creating 750-acre Lake Fort Parker. The CCC boys also built the roads, picnic areas, the park concession building and bath house. Most of the work was done by hand, digging with pickaxes and shovels and hauling rocks and cement in "Georgia buggies," deep wheelbarrows with two wheels.

Life wasn't all work at Camp Mexia. In the evenings, the CCC boys could get passes to go into town or go home. Many earned their high school diplomas in night classes with the camp teacher. Occasionally girls from Mexia and Groesbeck were invited to dances on the open terrace of the concession building. There, camp musicians created the big band sounds of Count Basie with saxophones, trumpets and clarinets. CCC boys with shoes shined and ties straight at evening inspections were rewarded with cake and ice cream on Friday afternoons. Unless they drew kitchen police duty for disciplinary infractions, the young men used weekend passes to go home.