

Fort Atkinson

Ford County, Kansas
on the
Santa Fe Trail

GPS: N37 45.150 W100 04.974

Fort Atkinson was the first regular army post on the Santa Fe Trail in the heart of Indian Country. At the time of its beginning there were forts at both ends of the trail, Fort Leavenworth (1827) on the Missouri River and Fort Marcy (1846) at Santa Fe New Mexico. In July 1850 it was a temporary camp, and on August 8, 1850 it was a permanent Fort.

Camp Mackay, was established near the Middle Crossing of the Arkansas river. On September 12, 1850, the soldiers at Camp Mackay moved to the new post on the Arkansas, as it was known until June, of 1851 when it was named Fort Atkinson. The fort was built of sod, covered with poles, brush, sod and canvas. The soldiers quartered there gave it the name of Fort Sod, and later Fort Sodom. It was known as Camp Mackay until June 25, 1851 when the name was changed to Fort Atkinson.

There were three other post named this; Fort Atkinson, Nebraska, 1819-1827, Fort Atkinson, Louisiana, 1830-1832, and Fort Atkinson, Iowa, 1840-1849.

The exact location on a later survey plat is the SW1/4, Section 29, Township 26S, Range 25 West of the Sixth Principal Meridian, about 2 miles west of Dodge City, Kansas. In September 22, 1853 the troops departed Fort Atkinson to transport property to Fort Riley. Before leaving they knocked down the sod structures. In February 1854 a request from the New Mexico territory to reestablish the fort. Stressing the need for the mail station as being of prime importance. The post was reoccupied the following year, from May 27 to October 2 by two companies of the Sixth infantry. They lived in their tents on the site. The fort's average number to troops stationed there from 1850 to 1853 was about 80 in number, except when the dragoons were present, the garrison was then about 145 strong. In 1854 the men present were about 140 on the average except when the Dragoons were present at the post. The Fort was abandoned for good in 1855, and destroyed to prevent their occupancy by the Indians.

The fort was located from one-half to three-quarters of a mile above the ruins of Fort Mann, it was established by Col. E.V. Summer and a detachment of the First Dragoons.

The Fort was 150feet on the north side, 355feet on the east and the west sides, and 60 feet on the south side. Their was a 20 feet extension on the south wall in the very southeast corner of the fort, making the south wall 80 feet in length. The gate was on the east wall in the southeast corner of the fort. Along the west wall inside the fort, from the south to the north their was a building for storage, then a blacksmith, then the wheelwright then a barracks. On the north wall was the Officers Quarters. There were also buildings along the east wall. The fort was built of sod and adobe brick.

This fort was also called, Fort Sumner, Fort Mackay and Fort Sodom and Fort Sod because of the building materials and conditions there.

Fort Atkinson on the Santa Fe trail, 1850-1854

Fort Atkinson
Fort Sumner
New Post
Fort Sod
Fort Sodom
Camp #57

Fort Atkinson was established 8 August 1850 by Lieutenant Colonel Edwin Vose Sumner, 1st U.S. Dragoons. It was located about two miles west of the present Dodge City, on the left side of the Arkansas River near the site of old Fort Mann. Intended to control the Indians and protect the Santa Fe Trail. This small army post was made entirely of sod buildings. The Army soon had another enemy beside the Indians field mice! Lieutenant Henry Heth, commanding officer, requisitioned a dozen cats from Fort Leavenworth to cope with the problem. Fort Atkinson was abandoned in 1854 due to the poor condition of the sod buildings.



Painting Courtesy of K. Chadd

A marker for Caches, Fort Atkinson, and Fort Mackey four miles west of Dodge City Kansas, on U.S. 50 reads; Caches northwest of the marker 1,100 feet dated 1823, was a famous old trail campsite and early army headquarters. Fort Atkinson, 1850 to 1854, 2,500 feet southeast, post office, 1854 to 1857; Indian Treaty, 1853; Fort Mackey, 1850.

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Larry & Carolyn
St. John, Ks.

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