

# Fort Davis

National Historic Site

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



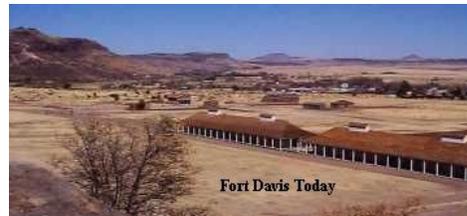
Curriculum Materials Grades 6-8

Student Activity: Protecting the Past—Why Should I Care?



Fort Davis 1885

## Protecting the Past Why Should I Care?



Fort Davis Today

The past helps us know where we came from and what the future may be like. We know some amazing facts about human history from the preservation and study of the past. For example, the ancient Mayans played a game similar to basketball over a thousand years ago. We know this because we discovered their ball courts. So, move over, Michael Jordan! The Indus civilization had a form of indoor plumbing over 4,000 years ago. Mexican farmers today are learning to use ancient farming techniques that are better for the environment and more productive than “modern” ways.

One of the biggest reasons you should care about the past is because knowing, caring, and learning about our human past is one of the unique things that sets us apart from other living creatures. The study of the past helps us make better choices for our future. Imagine, if people had not valued the preservation of historic sites, what might have happened to records of the Alamo’s heroes. About 1900, the Alamo was about to be destroyed to make way for more buildings in downtown San Antonio. Clara Driscoll and the Daughters of the Republic of Texas stepped in and bought the Alamo and surrounding properties. Without their foresight, you wouldn’t be able to visit there today, and the stories of the Alamo might have been lost. What if Fort Davis had become a golf resort or had simply been allowed to become ruins? The stories of pioneers and brave soldiers—black and white—would have been lost. We would have lost part of our national heritage and character.

As humankind considers the possibility of colonies on other planets, what can we learn from our ancestors who settled a wild and unmapped land? Using what you have learned about the settlement of west Texas and the people of Fort Davis, what advice would you give to future pioneers in space? On the following page, write a letter of advice from the viewpoint of a 19th-century pioneer, woman or man, Native American or soldier.

What would you advise them to take with them to their new home in space? What things would be essential? Which would be sentimental reminders of home? What kind of skills and occupations would be needed to settle a new world? What should they be prepared for? What if there are already inhabitants on the planet? Being aware of history, how should they treat those inhabitants? List some things that would be essential to accomplish in the first days of settlement?

A quick look at some of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century letters on file in the library at Fort Davis National Historic Site shows various ways that letters ended back then. They included: Yours truly, Yours very truly, Very truly yours, Affectionately, Sincerely, and Respectfully. Choose whichever ending you would like for your letter.

