

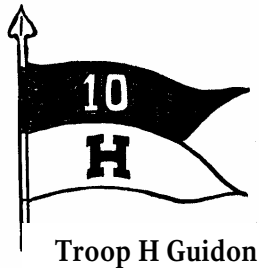
Fort Davis

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MOVING WITH THE FRONTIER ARMY Tenth Cavalry Officers' Wives Follow the Guidon

In March of 1885, the Tenth U. S. Cavalry received orders of its impending transfer from Fort Davis, Texas to the Department of Arizona. The Tenth, one of two cavalry regiments of African- American troops commanded by white officers, was organized in 1866. It had spent its entire existence on the frontier, first in Kansas and Oklahoma, and then in Texas beginning in 1873.



Troop H Guidon

For many officers and their wives, the transfer was welcomed. Others accepted the news hesitantly. A few were angry. They felt the regiment had already "done its time" on the western frontier.

The Colonel's Lady

Alice Kirk Grierson, the wife of the regiment's commander, Colonel Benjamin Grierson, accepted the news stoically. Now fifty- six years of age, she had been following her husband from one western post to another for almost twenty years. This move, however, would be most difficult.

For the first time in her 'army career,' she would be leaving a child behind. Robert, the second eldest of her four sons, would remain in the Fort Davis area to manage the family's ranch properties. Alice's two youngest sons, Harry and George, would travel with her. Her oldest son, Charles, a second lieutenant in his father's regiment, would be moving with the regiment.

Still Alice echoed what she had written years earlier in a letter to her husband when he first accepted a commission in the army: "I have no intention of going back to Illinois for years, if you remain in the Indian Territory. You must remember that I think the comfort of a family depends much more upon the family being together in love, than on the house they are quartered in . . . I am unwilling to be separated from you any longer than absolutely necessary."

Alice journeyed to Illinois to visit family and friends while her husband traveled with the regiment to Arizona Territory. In July, she and her youngest sons joined the Colonel. According to Grierson, "Alice and boys seem to like Whipple Barracks quite well." The post, which served as the regiment's headquarters, was located at the edge of the city of Prescott.

Other Officers' Wives

Another officer's wife who would also make Whipple Barracks her home was Grace Fuller Maxon. A niece of



Alice Kirk Grierson



Grace Fuller Maxon

Colonel Grierson's, Grace was married to the regiment's quartermaster, Lieutenant Mason M. Maxon.

Grace had come to Fort Davis in October of 1882 as a bride. Two of her children were born at Fort Davis, and her husband and his father had purchased a sizeable amount of property in the Fort Davis area. Neither Grace nor her husband viewed the move with anticipation. At one point, the lieutenant talked of resigning from the army rather than transfer to Arizona Territory.

Lieutenant Maxon did not resign. After an extended visit back East, Grace and the children were eager to return to army life.

An Exciting Adventure

One officer's wife who was ready for a change was Helen Fuller Davis, the wife of Lieutenant William Davis, Jr. Helen was also Colonel Grierson's niece and the older sister of Grace Fuller Maxon. She so looked forward to the move that she elected to travel with the regiment.



Helen Fuller Davis

“I was very comfortably fixed up for the trip,” she wrote. “I had a big carriage or hack with satin curtains which were a great convenience, giving me privacy and protection from the sun. I had a maid and very good driver who sat out in front. Instead of horses there was a huge pair of mules to my fine coach. My uncle had insisted on me having a fine willow rocker fastened on the back of my carriage so that I could have a comfortable place to rest while the wagons were being unpacked and the tents put up.”

At El Paso, the Rio Grande was too high to ford, so the group had to wait until permission was received from Washington for the regiment to cross into Mexico. While in El Paso, Helen wrote that the “citizens entertained us right royally, dances, dinners, etc.”

Helen and her husband and their two young daughters made Fort Grant their new home. Helen was most pleased with the post. Her quarters were good. Most importantly, her husband's chief adversary, Major Anson Mills, was assigned to another post.

Following the Guidon

Another officer's wife who chose to travel with the troops rather than by rail was Virginia Maxwell Keyes, wife of Captain Alexander S. B. Keyes. Born in Taos, New Mexico Territory, in 1850, Virginia was the oldest daughter of Lucien Maxwell and Luz Beaubien Maxwell, two of the wealthiest and most influential people in the Territory.



Virginia Maxwell Keyes

Virginia met Keyes when he arrived at the Cimarron agency in August of 1869 to serve as Indian agent. Knowing that her parents would never consent to her marrying an army officer, Virginia eloped with him the next spring. At first it was reported that her father forbade the mere mention of Virginia's name in his presence, but within the year the father and daughter had reconciled.

The trip to Arizona in April of 1885 was not an easy one for Virginia. She had not recovered from the birth of a daughter at Fort Davis three months earlier, and she had a number of other children to watch and tend to. Yet, she readily accepted her fate and like Helen Davis seemed to enjoy her new home at Fort Grant. Virginia followed her husband from one frontier post to another until he retired in 1896.

For Gertrude Gardner Eggleston, the move to Arizona meant leaving her parents at Fort Davis. The daughter of Post Surgeon and Mrs. William Gardner, Gertrude had grown up



Gertrude Gardner Eggleston

in the army. In July of 1884 at Fort Davis, she married Lieutenant Millard F. Eggleston, Tenth Cavalry.

Gertrude chose to remain at Fort Davis with her parents until her husband had fixed up their quarters at their new home, Fort Verde.

Another officer's wife who remained at Fort Davis rather than travel with the regiment was Mary Braxton Bigelow.



Mary Braxton Bigelow

Married in Baltimore in 1883 to Lieutenant John Bigelow, Jr., they were the parents of a young son when it was time to leave Fort Davis. Mary Bigelow, like Gertrude Eggleston, would take the train once her husband had set up their new quarters. Lieutenant Bigelow wrote: "Mary and little J. III will not go with me. Mary might, if she were alone and would enjoy it, I have no doubt. I do not like the prospect of her having to travel alone with the baby, perhaps without a nurse."

The decision to have Mary travel by train was in part based on what Flora, the wife of Captain Charles Cooper, had told them, "that no army woman who had ever traveled with troops would make this march in preference to going by rail."



Flora Green Cooper

Flora Cooper and her children joined four other Tenth Cavalry wives for the journey to Arizona Territory. They left Fort Davis on April 27, 1885 and proceeded to Marfa where they boarded the westbound Southern Pacific train.

The group traveled to Fort Bowie and rejoined the regiment, which arrived there on April 29. At Bowie, the troops of the regiment were mustered and then reassigned to various posts in Arizona.

Whether the wives traveled with the regiment or joined their husbands later, most were pleased with their new homes. Probably Martha Summerhayes, the wife of an Eighth U. S. Infantry officer, best expressed the feelings of all officers' wives when she wrote after returning to the frontier from a visit back East: "It all seems so good to me. I was happy to see the soldiers again, the drivers, and teamsters, and even the sleek government mules. The old blue uniforms made my heart glad . . . I was back again in the army. I had cast my lot with a soldier, and where he was, was home to me."