

**Fort Davis**  
National Historic Site

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Curriculum Materials Grades 2-5

# 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Medicine and the Fort Davis Post Hospital



**The Hospital at Fort Davis was built in 1876.**

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Teacher Notes: Life and Death at Fort Davis

**Topic:** Life and Death at Fort Davis

### Standards and Objectives:

Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
<b>Social Studies:</b>	<b>Social Studies:</b>	<b>Social Studies:</b>	<b>Social Studies:</b>
113.4 - 1,4,14,17,18	113.5 - 10,12,16,17,18	113.6 - 6,22,23,24	113.7 - 5,18,22,23,24, 25,26,27
<b>Language Arts:</b>	<b>Language Arts:</b>	<b>Language Arts:</b>	<b>Language Arts:</b>
110.4 - 2,4,7,9,12,13,20	110.5 - 2,4,7,9,12,13,20	110.6 - 4,10,11,12,13 19,22,23,24,25	110.7 - 4,10,11,12,13, 19,22,23,24,25

### Materials Needed:

- Copies of *Living and Dying at Fort Davis* (2 pages—including “Cemetery Record Fort Davis 1880-1888”) that can be made into overhead transparencies and
- Copies of student worksheet entitled “Life and Death at Fort Davis” (1 page)
- Copies of the student worksheet *Memorials* (1 page)
- Dictionary
- Optional — a computer to research memorials
  - books or websites that include ideas and pictures of memorials

### Lesson Activity:

Begin by asking students the following questions:

- \* What are some things you can do today to contribute to a healthy lifestyle?
- \* Think about health 100 - 150 years ago on the frontier.
- \* What things did you just name that might not have been possible for the soldiers?
- \* How does diet or nutrition contribute to health, illness, and sometimes death?
- \* What about sanitation? What about medicines? What about modern diseases like AIDS, Avian Flu, or Mad Cow Disease?

### Activities and Projects:

#### \* Living and Dying at Fort Davis

—Read and discuss the information. Students can look up such words as dysentery, consumption, inflammation, abscessed, obstruction, and typhoid fever.

—Using a Cemetery Record

► This record is only for military deaths that occurred between 1880 and 1888 at the fort. Discuss the fact there were more deaths at Fort Davis during this time, but we do not have the official records of them. Babies and children—not just soldiers—also died, and sometimes women died in childbirth or from illness. Some accounts were written in journals or diaries.

► Before looking at the Fort Davis Cemetery Record, ask students what they think was the main cause of death for soldiers. After looking at the record, ask if anything

surprises them. Ask the students how they think this record might compare to one of pioneers or other people living on the frontier at that time; how it might compare with soldiers in the armed forces today (army, navy, marines, coast guard, air force, national guard).

► Students will use the record to categorize deaths.

**\* Memorials...Designing a Memorial**

—Students can research memorials in books or on the internet. Have them consider what types of memorial would be appropriate if they were designing a memorial at Fort Davis, say, to be located at the cemetery.

—A source that might be helpful is the book *Our National Monuments* by Eleanor Ayer (1992, Millbrook Press).

—The rationale for designing a memorial is to provide an activity that requires a higher level of thinking by allowing students to synthesize their knowledge about the people who lived at Fort Davis, their struggles and contributions to our history. Memorials such as the Statue of Liberty in New York or the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. evoke an immediate rush of feeling and emotions about immigrants or about American soldiers who fought and died for our country during the Vietnam War. Through discussion and collaboration, students will create an appropriate memorial for Fort Davis.

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Student Activity: Life and Death at Fort Davis

## Living and Dying at Fort Davis

Life in the 1800s was hard. For American adults, the leading cause of death was consumption (tuberculosis); for children it was measles. The average life expectancy in 1900 for white men was 49; for black men it was 33. Have you heard of anyone dying of TB or measles recently? In the last 100 years, people have been living longer.



Edie Grierson, dead, 1877 – daughter of Colonel Benjamin Grierson. She had just turned 13 years old

Back then, people worked long hours and had no safety equipment. Good sanitation practices were almost unknown. People did not know what caused disease. They drank water from a creek and did not know about germs or about why it was important to wash their hands before meals.

There was very little that doctors could do to treat illnesses except to give medication to ease the pain. One Fort Davis soldier jammed his finger while playing baseball, and the army surgeon amputated his finger! People often died from diseases like pneumonia and diarrhea that are now treatable with modern medicines.



Forceps designed to remove arrowheads

Soldiers at Fort Davis endured many hardships. Their daily lives required a lot of physical labor. Marches involved long days of walking, often wearing ill-fitting shoes and carrying heavy equipment & weapons.

At the fort, work was difficult and sometimes hazardous. Jobs included constructing buildings at the post, cutting slabs of meat with a saw, lifting heavy containers of water, and chopping wood. There were no such things as hard hats for protection! Accidents were common—like getting kicked by a horse or mule, being run over by a wagon, or being accidentally shot at target practice. Living in close quarters with a large group of men exposed soldiers to contagious diseases like colds

(called catarrh) and sore throats. Some soldiers got hurt in fights with other soldiers. There were also rare encounters with Apache.

Many of the enlisted soldiers at Fort Davis could not read or write, so we do not have many letters or personal accounts of their lives. Using official army death records, however, we can better understand the dangers that soldiers faced.



Examples of medical instruments from the 1800s. (Photo courtesy of Fort Davis National Historic Site)

## Cemetery Record — Fort Davis, Texas 1880-1888



**Original gravestone from Fort Davis cemetery of Private Wesley Lane who died in 1883**

(This information comes from official army reports.)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Cause of Death</u>
March 23, 1880	Private Benjamin Small	24	Consumption
March 25, 1880	Private Aaron Smith	28	Homicide— quarrel in town; Killed by constable
July 30, 1880	Private Martin Davis	22	Killed in Action with Apaches
September 4, 1880	Private Henry Miller	33	Accidentally shot (not stationed at Ft. Davis when he died; he was escorting the paymaster)

April 8, 1881	Private Albert Christopher	28	Obstruction of Bowel
April 9, 1881	Private Rafael Ortiz	21	Typhoid Pneumonia
July 1, 1881	Private Thomas Everett	24	Consumption
July 9, 1881	Private John S. Mitchell	22	Internal injuries resulting from being kicked by a horse
August 30, 1881	Private William Knoll	24	Typhoid Fever
September 27, 1881	Private James F. Holmes	22	Gunshot Wound, accidental shooting
December 17, 1881	Private John Duffy	25	Acute Dysentery
January 6, 1882	Corporal Benjamin Helm	37	Inflammation of the Lungs
February 19, 1882	First Sergeant Thomas Ferris	40	Consumption
November 25, 1882	Private John Gaddess	40	Pneumonia
March 5, 1883	Private Dorsey Johnson	24	Pneumonia
March 17, 1883	Private James Johnson		Pneumonia
April 9, 1883	Private James Stewart	29	Accidentally killed by another soldier en route to Presidio Davis
May 2, 1883	Private George Foster		Gunshot Wound—killed near Fort Davis
August 2, 1883	Private John Muchs		Inflammation of the Lungs
September 20, 1883	Private Charles Robinson	24	Pneumonia
October 2, 1883	Private Wesley Lane	36	Chronic Inflammation of the Lungs
November 2, 1884	Private Jerry F. Freeman		Acute Dysentery
November 18, 1884	Private James Gardner	37	Remittent Fever
November 18, 1884	Private John Spinner	24	Typhoid Fever
November 25, 1884	Private Benjamin Banks	23	Acute Dysentery
December 5, 1884	Private Henry C. Beresford	34	Inflammation of the Brain (Cerebritis)
September 12, 1885	Ex-Private John McCann	38	Chronic Dysentery (not stationed at Fort Davis when he died; he never served at Fort Davis)
September 17, 1885	Ex-Private Sidney Johnson	38	Pneumonia (Phthisis Pulmonalis)
January 18, 1886	Private George Stocker	33	Accidental Gunshot Wound
June 29, 1886	Ex-Corporal John H. Mason	38	Softening of the Brain
October 5, 1886	Private John H. MacCarthy	22	Abscess of the Liver
October 12, 1886	Private John Gunning		Acute Peritonitis
October 15, 1886	Private Charles Schurtz		Typhoid Fever
December 8, 1886	Private Thomas W. Cunningham		Typhoid Fever
December 8, 1886	Private William Colohan		Typho-Malaria
June 15, 1887	Private John J. Kerins	39	Paralysis of Heart developed from Quotidian Intermittent Fever
July 8, 1887	Private Patrick J. McGill	21	Drowned in Rio Grande while on duty
July 16, 1887	Private Michael Arbogash	25	Abscess of Liver
October 10, 1888	Private Joseph Purma	26	Fell from Train near Valentine



*At the Fort Davis post hospital (shown here from the rear around 1889), many soldiers suffered and died—far from home & family.*

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Student Activity: Life and Death at Fort Davis

## Life and Death at Fort Davis

A. Using the Fort Davis cemetery death record, tally the number of deaths in each category.

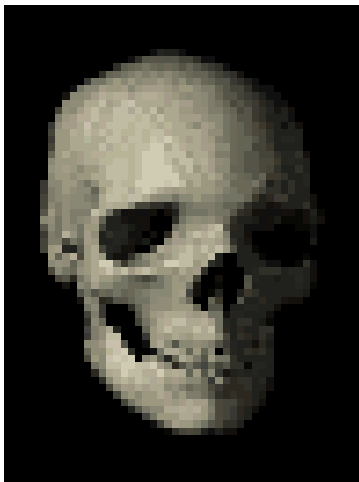
- 1. Gunshot \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Killed in Action \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Obstruction of Bowel \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Typhoid \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Consumption \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. Accidents \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. Dysentery \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. Inflammation of Lungs \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. Fever \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. Inflammation of Brain \_\_\_\_\_
- 11. Liver Abscess \_\_\_\_\_
- 12. Pneumonia \_\_\_\_\_



Embalming a dead soldier's body during the Civil War (Photo courtesy of Library of Congress)

B. What was the average age of soldiers who died at Fort Davis 1880-1888? \_\_\_\_\_

C. What conclusions can you draw from the Fort Davis cemetery record?




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D. Write a paragraph describing the hazardous conditions of living at a frontier fort.

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E. What do you think could have been done to lessen the dangers? \_\_\_\_\_

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Surgeon's set of medical instruments used during the 1800s  
Photo courtesy of Fort Davis National Historic Site



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Student Activity: Life and Death at Fort Davis --  
Memorials

## Memorials

There are many ways to honor people who die. We often see a marker with flowers along the highway where a person was killed in an accident. When someone dies, people often take flowers, cards, and mementos to the person's home. Buildings or streets are named in honor of those who have died. What holidays do we celebrate that serve as memorials to honor those who have died?



Capt. James Hill Patterson

Elizabeth Vandegriff Patterson

John Love Patterson

The military honors a deceased soldier with a formal funeral. On August 20, 1873, Captain James Hill Patterson's funeral at Fort Davis included a funeral procession led by the post band, followed by men of Company D of the 25th Infantry, the casket with pallbearers, soldiers of Company G of the 25th Infantry, carriages, troops of Company I of the 9th Cavalry, soldiers of Company E of the 25th Infantry, citizens from the local community, and then all the officers of the post. It must have been quite an impressive procession! Nevertheless, when Captain Patterson died at age 30 of an illness, he left behind a grieving wife, Elizabeth, and 5-year-old son, John.

After Fort Davis was abandoned, the remains of the soldiers and others who were buried in the fort cemetery were transferred to the San Antonio National Cemetery. The graves there are marked with small stone markers or headstones with the name,



National Cemetery in San Antonio with Fort Davis graves

rank, branch of the service, birth and date of death etched on them. National cemeteries located around the country also have special memorials to groups of soldiers —such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, or a memorial to the soldiers who died in World War II.



Funeral procession near Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia

***DIRECTIONS:*** You have been hired to design a memorial for the soldiers and others who died at Fort Davis. Work alone or with a small group of classmates or a partner. Sketch a plan of the memorial, write a description of it, or do both.

As you plan what your memorial will be like, consider the following:

1. the historical event or people you want to have remembered
2. the most important ideas about them
3. how you can best show the ideas (will you need symbols, or what?)
4. what feelings you want to evoke in the people who will see your memorial
5. where you think the best place would be to put your memorial
6. what words or dates, if any, you might put on your memorial (some memorials have quotes)
7. what it will look like — try several different ideas before deciding on the best one
8. what materials will be needed to construct the memorial and how big it will be

After completing your memorial, imagine some of the things people might say when they view it. Do you think it will create any controversy? Does it matter to you if people like it?