

# Fort Davis

## National Historic Site

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Curriculum Materials Grades 9-12

Student Activity: Picturing the Past

LESSON: Picturing the Past – Old Photos Tell Stories

Summary: Using primary source photos from Fort Davis, students explore the stories of individuals who lived at Fort Davis. Through historic photo analysis, the following lesson stimulates student interest and curiosity about Fort Davis National Historic Site by introducing specific individuals and events that were a part of the history surrounding Fort Davis.

Lesson Objectives:

- To develop a perspective of life in a different time than the students' current one
- To identify the various ethnic/cultural groups that played a role in Fort Davis life
- To explain how environment (geography, disease, etc.) affected the lives of Americans moving west
- To develop a deeper understanding of the hardships and untold stories of those who lived at Fort Davis
- To prepare for a visit to Fort Davis NHS or do as follow-up after a visit

Tools Provided:

- Historic primary source photographs (provided below)
- Copies of student analysis worksheets (provided below)
- Descriptive analysis of photos (provided below)

Procedure:

1. Opening Activity—Have students think of a picture of themselves with their family or friends. Then have students answer the following question: What would someone, who didn't know you, assume about you and the photograph? Next, initiate discussion about the stories that lie behind a single photograph. Teacher may model for students by bringing a photo of yourself and discuss the story behind the photo.
2. Before distributing copies of photo analysis sheets to students, explain that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most day-to-day life was not often photographed, so all of the historical photos they will see were posed. People certainly did not have digital cameras, like we do today. Much of the information we have about daily life back then is speculative, unless it's based on actual letters or journals. Today, technology allows us to record absolutely everything—so there will be no doubt in the future about how we lived in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Tell students to analyze each photo and provide their observations by answering the questions on the analysis sheet. Students will analyze the data in each photo: the individuals, objects, activities.

3. Students will view a series of photos and record their observations. Teacher can either provide copies of the photos, or project them in front of the classroom.
4. Once students have observed the series, return to the first photo and have students provide their observations to the class. After students have discussed some of their own observations, then reveal to the students the story behind the photographs. Repeat this procedure for each of the photographs. Having heard the stories surrounding the photographs, now have students provide three-to-four statements that they can make about life at Fort Davis. Have students provide a written constructed response.

Assessments:

- Identifying various groups present in the Fort Davis area in the years 1867-1891 through attached photo analysis worksheet
- Students may be assessed by using a rubric for their constructed response. The rubric is provided below on last page.

Extensions:

- Have students choose one of the photographs and create a narrative to be written from the perspective of the person or object in the photo. The story can be written in the form of a journal entry, a letter, a newspaper article, or as a re-telling of an event.
- If you visit Fort Davis National Historic Site, encourage students to inquire further into the stories of those who lived at or were involved with the Fort.

Resources:

- Photographs of Fort Davis (included below)
- Student photo analysis sheet (included below)
- Stories behind the Fort Davis Photographs (included below)

National Social Studies Standards:

I. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

II. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.

III. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

V. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions.

VI. Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

Photograph #1



Photograph #2



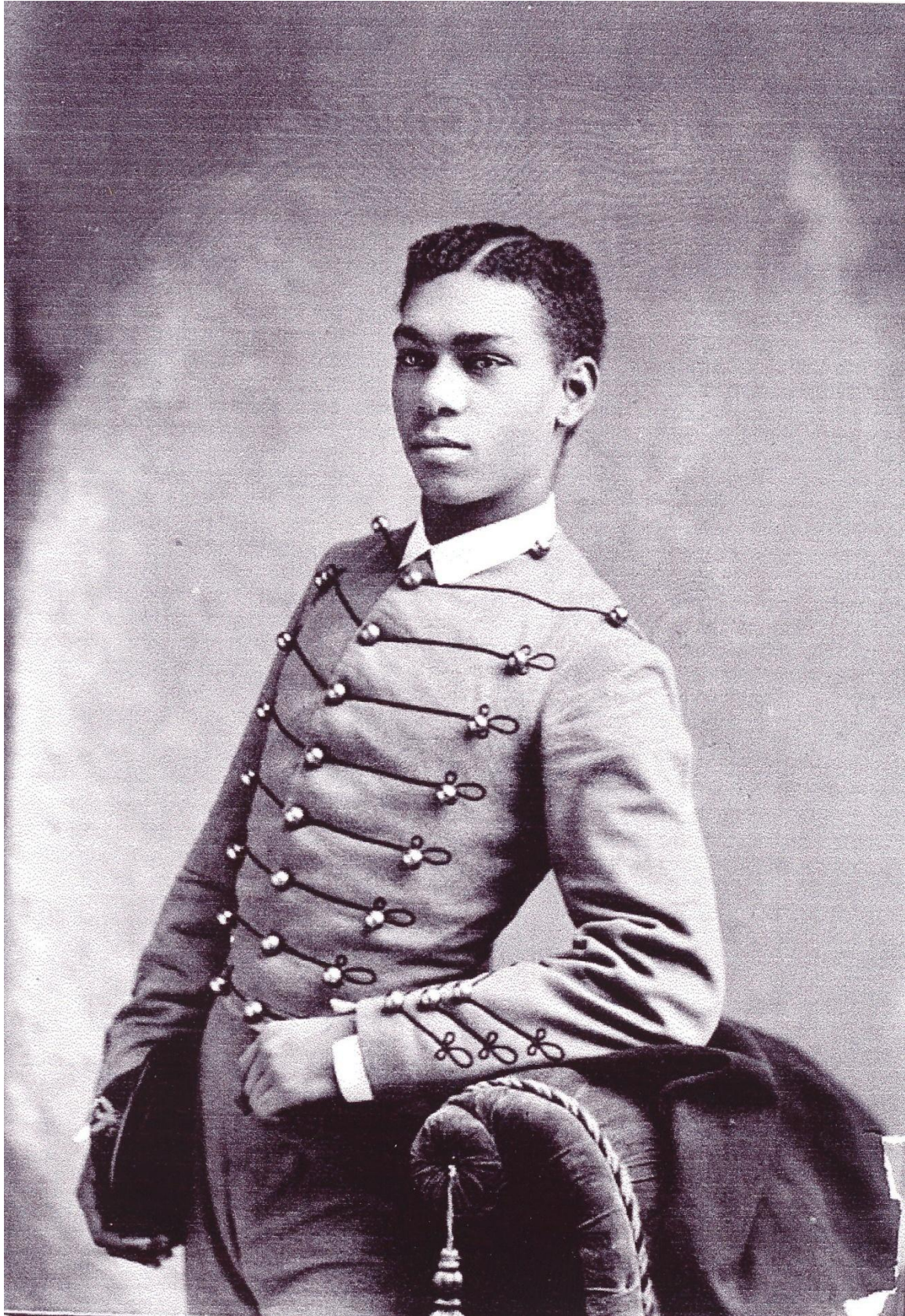
Photograph #3



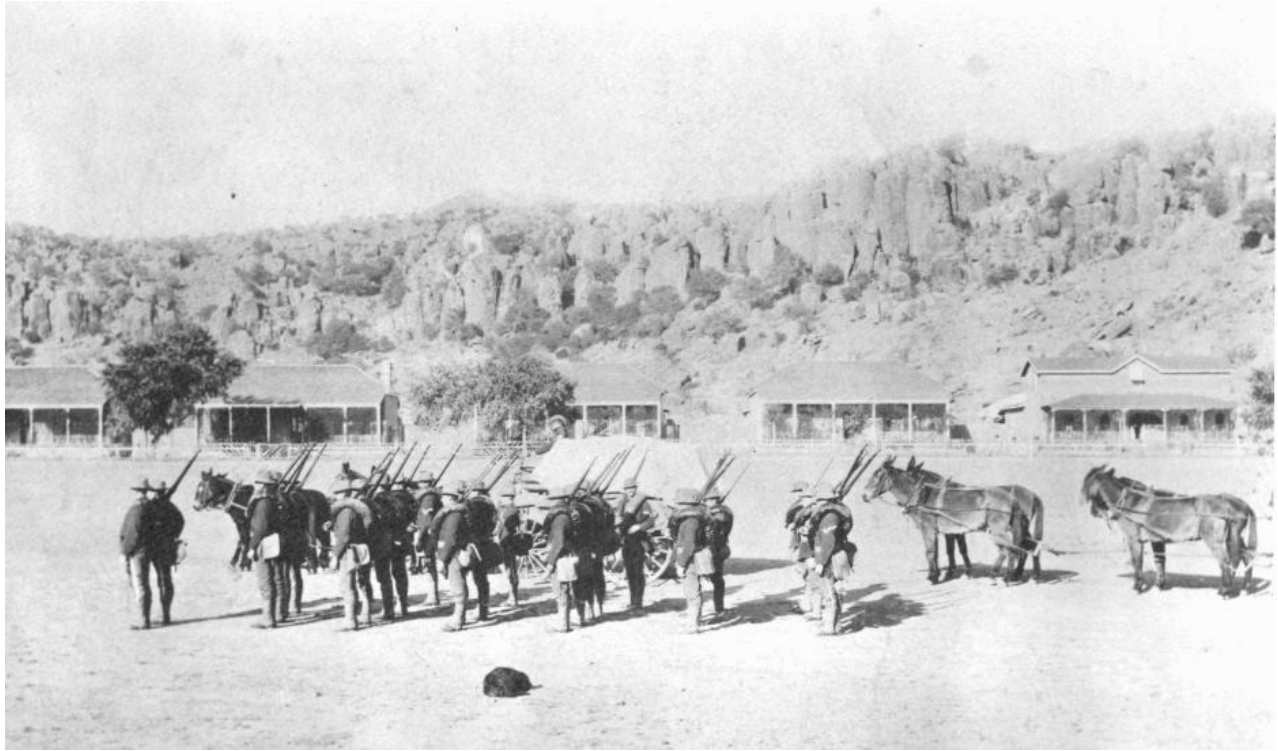
Photograph #4



Photograph #5



Photograph #6



Photograph #7



Photograph #8





# The Real Stories Behind the Photographs

## Photograph #1: Description

This photograph was taken of Edith Grierson, age 13, who was photographed soon after she died of typhoid fever. Edith was the daughter of Colonel Benjamin Grierson and his wife Alice, who were stationed at Fort Davis in the early 1880s. Edith died at Fort Concho (San Angelo) before the Griersons moved to Fort Davis. Typhoid fever is a bacterial disease contracted by ingesting contaminated water or food, such as drinking water out of the creek. Symptoms include fever, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and, in later stages, delirium. Alice mourned the loss of her daughter by visiting Edith's grave daily. However she remained strong for the rest of her family and carried on. Typhoid fever was also the cause of death of Abraham Lincoln's son, Willie Lincoln. Taking photos of dead people was a common practice in the 1800s.

## Photograph #2: Description

Private George Bentley was a soldier stationed at Fort Davis from 1868 to 1871. This is a photograph of George and his wife, Concepcion. In 1891, in just two weeks, all seven of their children died from diphtheria just after Fort Davis had closed. The daughter of the hospital steward and matron, born in 1876 and named Centennia America Williamson, also died of diphtheria in 1881 at Fort Davis, just before her fifth birthday; however there are no photographs of her. Diphtheria can be caused by bacteria that thrive in raw, unpasteurized milk. It is a highly contagious upper respiratory disease that is spread through sneezing and coughing. Symptoms include sore throat, high fever, and difficulty breathing as a membrane grows across the throat and suffocates the victim. Once a major killer of children, diphtheria today has been nearly eradicated in developed nations due to vaccinations required for children.

## Photograph #3: Description

This is a photograph taken of the skull of Corporal Richard Robinson, stationed at Fort Davis in the 1870s. Originally from Virginia, Robinson was sleeping in the barracks at Fort Davis when Sergeant Moses Marshall shot him in the head with a rifle. Marshall was found guilty of "cool, willful, and deliberate murder," and was sentenced to 99 years in prison. (He went to Huntsville.) The post surgeon at Fort Davis wired the skull back together and shipped it to Washington, D.C. to the Army Medical Museum, where it still is today.

## Photograph #4 :Description

Taken in the late 1880s, this photograph is of Thomas Hall Forsyth and family. From 1885 to 1891, Forsyth worked at Fort Davis as the Commissary Sergeant. Years earlier, as a young soldier in the Civil War, a cannon ball exploded into a fence and slammed a fence rail into Forsyth's chest, knocking him out cold. He was presumed dead and was being

buried when he woke up—just in time! After the Civil War, Forsyth remained in the army and enlisted in the Fourth U.S. Cavalry.

In 1887 at Fort Davis, he received permission to move his family into one of the vacant two-story officers' quarters; if you visit Fort Davis NHS today, you can see the remains of this house still standing. Several Forsyth children were born at Fort Davis. One infant, Pauline, died when she was a day old in 1886. Twins, Thomas & Agnes Mabel, were born in late 1887, and the army records say they were baptized at home. Another child, Patience, was born in 1890. Forsyth and his wife Mary Elizabeth had such a large family that some people at Fort Davis referred to them as "The Tribe."

#### **Photograph #5: Description**

This is Second Lieutenant Henry O. Flipper, the first Black man to graduate as an officer in the United States Army from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The photo was taken while he was still a cadet at West Point. He was stationed at Fort Davis in 1880-1881 and served as Assistant Quartermaster and Acting Commissary of Subsistence. He was born into slavery in Georgia, and began his education at eight years old alongside another slave, working in a wood shop. Flipper pursued his educational goals, receiving a recommendation from a Georgia congressman that allowed him to attend and graduate in 1877 from West Point.

While at Fort Davis, the commissary funds Flipper was in charge of were found missing; Flipper was blamed, and court martialed. A trial was held in the post chapel at Fort Davis, where Flipper was found not guilty of embezzlement; however he was convicted of making false statements, for signing financial records he knew to be incorrect, and for writing a check on a nonexistent bank account. Because he was found guilty on these charges, he was dismissed from the army based for "Conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentlemen." Flipper made several unsuccessful attempts to clear his name and be reinstated in the U.S. Army. This did not happen. More than 50 years after his death, the Army Board for Correction of Military Records in 1976 gave him an honorable discharge. In 1999, President William Clinton pardoned him.

#### **Photograph #6: Description**

The photo shows the men of Company K, Fifth U. S. Infantry, at Fort Davis preparing for a practice march in the fall of 1890. The men are under the command of Captain Frank Baldwin. They are wearing typical army field uniforms of the time. They are carrying their rifles and haversacks and have their shelter halves (one-half of a shelter tent) over their shoulders. The men and supply wagons are on the parade ground at Fort Davis. Notice the dog in the foreground.

Practice marches were very important. They taught the soldiers what it was really like to be out in the field. The soldiers on this practice march were in the field for almost two months. They marched all throughout the Big Bend country, traveling about 10 miles a day. A great deal of time was spent in the field even after raids by Comanche and Apache

Indians ceased. Today, the military has training exercises similar to the ones that were practiced at Fort Davis in the 1800s.

### **Photograph #7: Description**

This photo was taken in the late 1880s or early 1890s. The women in the photo were relatives of Commissary Sergeant Thomas Forsyth (photo #4 is the Forsyth family). The gentlemen were enlisted men, who were probably courting two of the young ladies.

All three young women were in their late teens or early twenties. As there was always a shortage of eligible young ladies at frontier military posts, these young ladies probably had their pick of the many eligible bachelors at the post!

Horseback riding was a favorite pastime for young ladies at frontier military posts, where women riding horseback were usually accompanied by male escorts for safety reasons. Ladies rode sidesaddle on a special saddle that allowed a woman to put both legs on the same side of the horse.

### **Photograph #8: Description**

This photograph of two Apache warriors was probably taken in late the 1870s or the 1880s. Their clothing is the typical Apache clothing worn during the warrior period. The men wore their hair shoulder length or shorter and held it in place with a cloth headband. The warrior on the right wears the traditional knee-high moccasins and leggings combined to form a boot. These had rawhide soles, buckskin uppers, and pointed curved-up toes. The warrior on the left is wearing heavy wool socks that seem to have been U. S. Government issue.

Both warriors are wearing long breechcloths of white cotton cloth. Both are carrying bows and arrows. The warrior on the right is wearing a bracelet, probably made from shells. Often shell bracelets and necklaces were worn for luck or to ward off evil spirits. Among the Apaches, it is difficult to separate raiding and warfare. Both were a way of life for the Apache. When food supplies were low, their choice was often to raid or to starve. With warfare, fighting was the chief objective. Survival was the goal.

**Content of “Picturing the Past” Constructed Response Rubric (36 points)**

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
<b>Grammar &amp; Spelling (Conventions)</b>	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.
<b>Focus on Topic (Content)</b>	There is one clear, well-focused topic. The main idea stands out and is supported by detailed information.	Main idea is clear, but the supporting information is general.	Main idea is somewhat clear, but there is a need for more supporting information.	The main idea is not clear. There is a seemingly random collection of information.
<b>Support for Topic (Content)</b>	Relevant, telling, quality details give the reader important information that goes beyond the obvious or predictable.	Supporting details and information are relevant, but one key issue or portion of the storyline is unsupported.	Supporting details and information are relevant, but several key issues or portions of the storyline are unsupported.	Supporting details and information are typically unclear or not related to the topic.