Welcome to Fort Lancaster State Historic Site, an 82-acre Crockett County property that preserves the remnants of the only post to protect the Lower Road between San Antonio and El Paso, established in 1855. Visitors can explore the ruins, imagining the once-impressive establishment of 25 buildings—including officers’ quarters, barracks, a blacksmith shop, hospital, sutler’s store, and bakery—while enjoying the sights, sounds, and wildlife of this real place in West Texas.

FORT LANCaster Company
Join us in protecting this special place. Consider volunteering as a docent or becoming a member of the Fort Lancaster Company, the site’s nonprofit friends organization. For more information please contact 432-836-4391.

PreservE The FUTURe
Help the Texas Historical Commission preserve the past while touring this historic site. Please be mindful of fragile historic artifacts and structures. We want to ensure their preservation for the enjoyment of future generations.

SEE THE SITES
From western forts and adobe structures to Victorian mansions and pivotal battlefields, the Texas Historical Commission’s state historic sites illustrate the breadth of Texas history.

Fort Lancaster
Fort Lancaster was a link in the chain of western forts that provided protection for westbound settlers, trade, and communication. Established as Camp Lancaster in 1855, the post became a permanent infantry fort one year later. The fort’s location was chosen because of easy access to fresh water from Live Oak Creek and proximity to the Lower San Antonio-El Paso Road. The first buildings on the site were temporary structures covered with canvas roofs. Work quickly began on developing more permanent structures, and by 1860, most of the buildings were made from stone and adobe bricks.

Life at the Post
Soldiers constructed the permanent buildings at Fort Lancaster with local materials. Limestone was used for the foundations, corners, chimneys, and sometimes the gable ends of the structures. Adobe bricks formed the walls, which were then stuccoed and whitewashed. Soldiers created the quicklime necessary for the mortar, stucco, and paint by burning chunks of limestone in a lime kiln. Many buildings were roofed with thatch made from grasses cut in the area, although a few had wooden shingles.

By 1858, Fort Lancaster housed approximately 150 enlisted men and three officers of companies H and K of the 1st U.S. Infantry. The soldiers who lived and worked at Fort Lancaster endured difficult conditions including the climate, limited resources, and tedious routines and duties. Maintaining the fort’s buildings and patrolling the local area were activities that took up most of their time. Skirmishes or military engagements were rare.

While the fort supplied limited, but necessary, provisions to travelers, it remained an isolated outpost. The only civilian presence was the mail handler at the relay station used by the San Antonio-San Diego Mail Line, and the sutler merchant who sold a limited number of goods to the soldiers. While a few women were present at the fort, they were usually the officers’ wives or laundresses hired by the Army. Opportunities for soldiers’ recreation were rare and frequently revolved around drinking and gambling.

The U.S. Army relinquished the fort during the Civil War. Confederate troops occupied some of the western forts, including Fort Lancaster, until 1862, but then abandoned them for the remainder of the war. Fort Lancaster was reoccupied by the U.S. Army as a sub-station of Fort Stockton in 1867 by rotating companies of the Buffalo Soldiers’ 9th Cavalry. They lived in the crudely restored barracks for months at a time as they re-established federal control of the area.

In December 1867, during this period of reoccupation, Company K of the 9th Cavalry successfully defended the post against a significantly larger force of Kickapoo and Lipan Apache raiders. This battle distinguishes Fort Lancaster as the only U.S. Army fort in Texas that suffered a direct attack by Native Americans.

Fort Lancaster was finally abandoned for good by the late 1870s. Eventually, much of its masonry was taken and used for buildings in nearby Sheffield.
COMPANY H ENLISTED MEN'S BARRACKS
Vacated in 1859, these barracks closely resembled those of Company K. That year, the Army transferred Company H to a newly established post along the Lower San Antonio-El Paso Road that eventually became Fort Stockton.

KITCHEN AND MESS HALL
Each company had its own dedicated kitchen and mess hall where soldier cooks prepared and served meals for the enlisted men. Meals revolved around limited food supplies—mostly beef, bread, and canned goods—but a hand-watered garden provided a few vegetables and melons during the summer.

LAUNDRESSES' QUARTERS
In 1860, there were four laundresses employed for Company K at Fort Lancaster. Each had her own living quarters made of adobe and stone, complete with an open hearth and stone chimney. Typically, laundresses charged each soldier $2 per month for washing, ironing, and mending their clothes.

QUARTERMASTER'S STOREHOUSE, GRANARY, AND CORRAL
The quartermaster provided general supplies and equipment for the soldiers. He also oversaw the bakery, blacksmith's shop and carpenter's shop, as well as the corral, granary, and hay yard for the fort's horses and mules.

GUARDHOUSE
Isolation and boredom often led to crimes ranging from neglect of duty to theft and desertion. Drunkenness was also a recurring problem, as soldiers had little else to do but drink and gamble in their spare time. The stone guardhouse, which functioned as a jail, was attached to the corral and the quartermaster's storehouse.

BAKERY
The bakery was a stone and adobe building with a large oven that measured approximately 12 feet wide and 11.5 feet deep. The fort's baker, also a soldier, was responsible for providing the daily ration of bread for an average of 130 men.

WALKING GUIDE
1 COMMANDING OFFICER'S QUARTERS
The largest residence at the fort was reserved for the Commanding Officer and his family. This structure was built of stone and adobe, with a wooden shingle roof. It had wood floors and an attached kitchen. This building also served as a stage relay station for the San Antonio-San Diego Mail Company.

2 OFFICERS' QUARTERS
Each officers' quarters originally consisted of two rooms separated by a double fireplace with a separate kitchen behind. By 1860, the kitchens had been attached and most structures had wooden shingle roofs. Unmarried officers and officers with families lived in these residences.

3 CEMETERY
The cemetery included soldiers and their family members stationed at Fort Lancaster. Known burials include Private Joseph H. Norris, the grave of Capt. Arthur T. Lee's 15-month-old son, and another grave with a headstone simply inscribed "Little Margaret."

4 HOSPITAL
The post hospital was an adobe structure with a dispensary, storeroom, small three-bed ward, and an attached kitchen. The hospital staff included a surgeon, hospital steward, nurse, matron, and dedicated cook.

5 COMMISSARY
The commissary, along with the quartermaster's storehouse, was one of the first stone buildings constructed at Fort Lancaster. It supplied soldiers with government-issued food and provisions. Provisions were bought from private contractors and shipped along the Lower Road from San Antonio to the fort.