

Fort McCulloch | A mostly forgotten Choctaw historical site

In 2012 David Howington, a local historian, approached the Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Office about conducting historical research at Fort McCulloch. Staff at Historic Preservation made several trips to the fort to document some of the finds made there by Mr.

Editor's Note: This month's *Iti Fabvssa* is part two in a two-part series by James Briscoe on Fort McCulloch.

Howington. A retired historical archeologist was consulted for further advice, who began with a review of old historical maps and aerial photographs of the property. Aerial photographs from the 1940s were found to show a great deal of detail about the area that no longer exists, due to farming and land improvements over the years.

A review of available literature about post revealed a confusion of accounts and facts about the old fort, its make-up and even as to where it exactly was.

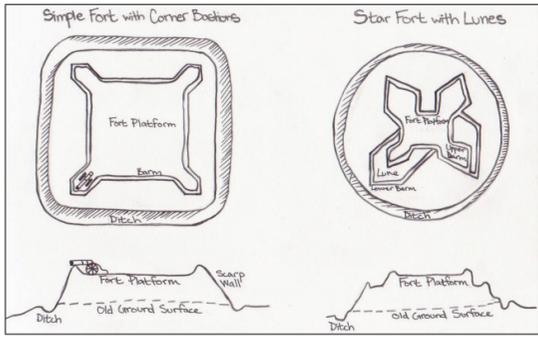
A number of visits have been made to the area over the



Detail of the remaining portion of the main fortified position, as depicted on the 1948 aerial photograph.



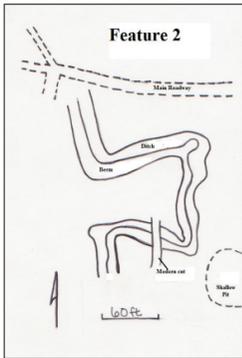
Iti Fabvssa



Generalized fort plans at Fort McCulloch.

past year and over a dozen fairly impressive archeological features have been recorded. Fortified positions include several star forts and open trench and berm positions located from 100 to 300 yards apart, with each supported by one or more other fortified positions. Star forts were fairly simple platforms, built up with earth 3 to 5 feet high on points of high ground. Most were rectangular with berm walls 2 to 4 feet high above the fort platform and triangular bastions in each corner. The 'fort' was surrounded on at least two sides by a trench about 10 feet wide and 5 to 8 feet deep. Open fortified positions generally have trenches and berms of dirt on three sides, and open from behind the area being guarded.

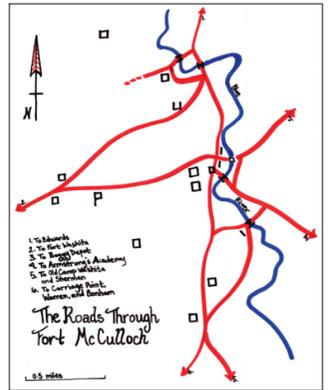
A number of roads converge on the fort area and the focus of the fortifications was to guard the traffic along the roads. So far, four river fords and one bridge location have been identified on this part of the Blue River. The main road through the post was the Texas/Butterfield Road from Boggy



Feature 2, next to the Texas/Butterfield Road.

Depot to the northeast and Fort Washita to the west.

Other roads through the area include the old Dragoon Road from Camp Holm to the north, the Fort Towson and Armstrong Academy Road from the east-southeast, the road to Sherman and Bonham to the south, and a branch road to Preston/Denison to the southwest. The bridge location is marked by a large gauge braided steel cable still firmly attached to its anchor on the riverbank. The



Main Roadways (red) and fortified positions (squares) through Fort McCulloch.

toll bridge erected after the Civil War. There are references to an earlier 'rickety' bridge at this location before the war. A mill built on the river by Claude Nail in the 1840s (and used by the fort) has not been identified at this point. Local tradition says that there were the graves of several soldiers next to the Nail/Folsom family cemetery at Nail's Station on the east side of the river. A brief visit to the area in 2012 did not locate any graves but several sandstone rocks (such as was common markers of the period) were noted piled next to the wrought iron fence enclosing the Nail/Folsom graves.

One of the more impressive features at the fort was a corral complex which included a Glanders compound and one adjacent to it for the general remuda. Glanders was a deadly disease for horses and the Confederates learned that new animals had to be quarantined for a period to stop the spread of the virus long before it was heard of in the north. According to era descriptions, the Glanders compound would have had a stockade and a berm perimeter. A low berm remains in place around two sides of the compound today. The compound and remuda corral show clearly on the earlier aerial photographs, across a sunken roadway from the quartermaster's compound. A log cabin that once existed in the area also shows clearly on the old aerals, but has since been lost to a stock pond on the property.

A great deal of research remains to be done at this important military post.