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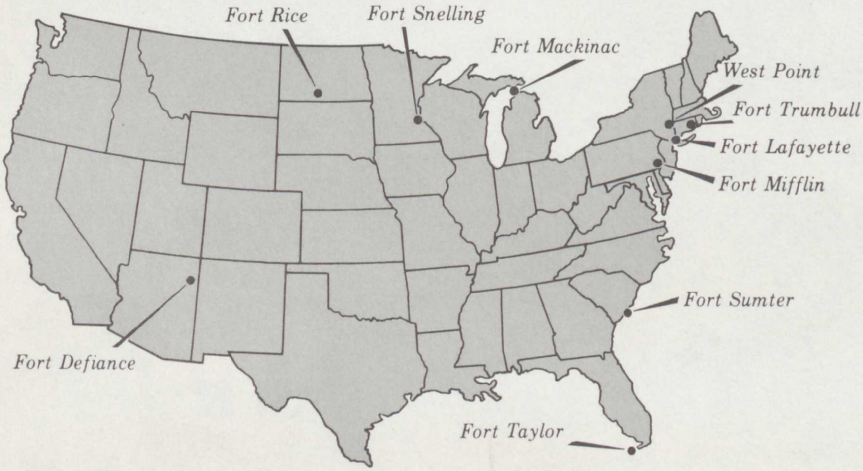
THE EASTMAN FORTS



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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

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THE ARTIST—SETH EASTMAN

Seth Eastman was appointed to the United States Military Academy at West Point from the State of Maine in 1824. Upon his graduation in 1829, he was commissioned a second lieutenant and assigned to the 1st Infantry.

Eastman was posted first to Fort Crawford, Wisconsin, then to Fort Snelling, Minnesota. From 1833 to 1840 he was a topographical engineer and Assistant Teacher of Drawing at the Military Academy. The Seminole Indian Wars called him back to frontier duty, and in 1841 he returned to Fort Snelling as its commander. There Captain Eastman was in daily contact with local Indian tribes, who provided plenty of material for his sketchbook and for the writings of his wife, Mary Henderson Eastman. One of her publications, entitled *Dakotah: or, Life and Legends of the Sioux Around Fort Snelling*, is said to have supplied the poet Longfellow with the description of the Falls of Minnehaha which appears in "Hiawatha."

The Bureau of Indian Affairs chose Captain Eastman to illustrate a large government publication, *History, Condition, and Future Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*, beginning in 1850. The project occupied Eastman for five years.

Between 1855 and 1861, Eastman went from Forts Duncan and Chadbourne, Texas, as a major in the 5th Infantry, to special duty in Washington, D.C., then back on frontier duty in Utah. At the beginning of the Civil War, he was again in Washington, and from there headed north as a lieutenant colonel in the 1st Infantry. He served until January 1863 as Mustering and Disbursing Officer for Maine and New Hampshire, then as Military Governor of Cincinnati. At the end of 1863, he retired on disability in the line of duty. He was retained in this status to command at Elmira, New York; Fort Mifflin (then a military prison), Pennsylvania; and Harrodsburg Military Asylum, Kentucky. He was brevetted brigadier general on 9 August 1866 for his service during the War.

In 1867 Congress commissioned Eastman, a member of the National Academy of Design, to do two series of paintings. The first series, nine Indian scenes, went to the Indian Affairs Committee. The second series, seventeen principal forts, which was to be displayed in the offices of the Committee on Military Affairs, was completed shortly before his death in 1875.

Prints in this series are reproduced from paintings on display in the United States Capitol, by permission of the Office of the Architect of the Capitol, Washington, D.C. Pamphlet prepared by Kathy O'Brien, Historical Reference Branch, U.S. Army Center of Military History.

FORT DEFIANCE, ARIZONA TERRITORY

Fort Defiance was located in the middle of the Navaho Indian country, about 200 miles west of the Rio Grande del Norte. It was established in 1851, following a number of incidents resulting from the latest treaty between the Navaho and the Federal Government. Most of the buildings, completed in 1853, were of logs and adobe. These were later supplemented with stone storehouses. There were no protecting palisades, but rather a central plaza surrounded by quarters, barracks, guardhouse, prison, and a few other buildings. Inspector General Joseph K. F. Mansfield had reported: ". . . this post was in a high state of discipline, and every department of it unexceptionable and highly creditable to the distinguished officer, Major Kendrick. The troops were all in the old uniform, no other having been furnished . . . . Supplies good and abundant with the exception of shoes and socks which soldiers have been obliged to purchase of the sutler at high rates. The post has the disadvantage of being commanded . . . by a rocky ridge on the east; but this evil can readily be remidied [sic] by the erection on the ridge of two small blockhouses."

Mansfield's suggestion was adopted in 1858, and there the post stood, open and defiant. The men were forced to defend the fort only once before the Civil War closed the post forever, but the garrison was provided with a unique diversion from the monotonous routine in August 1857 when Edward F. Beale's expedition passed through. Beale had been authorized by the Secretary of War, Jefferson Davis, to survey a wagon route from Fort Defiance to the Colorado River and to test some newly purchased pack animals—camels. The results of the test were promising, but the Civil War put an end to further experiments.

A British observer commented on what the soldier's life was like the rest of the time. ". . . the duties are harassing and the entire life one of privation, without any of the advantages, the emoluments, or honours to be derived from a more active service. Perfectly isolated, as these outposts are—removed at a distance from any town or village, the soldier, apart from the same endless round of duty, is thrown upon his individual resources to pass away the time—to kill the hours of tedious solitude, and beguile away the extreme loneliness of his situation. The supplies are always brought from a distance, which from accidental circumstances sometimes fail."

FORT LAFAYETTE, NEW YORK

Fortification was begun in 1812 of an artificial island, located in that part of New York Harbor called the Narrows, to the east of the main ship channel and directly west of Fort Hamilton. Originally called Fort Diamond, it was first garrisoned in September 1822. The name was changed the following year to honor the forthcoming visit of the Marquis de Lafayette.

Company E, 2d Regiment of Artillery, was stationed at Fort Lafayette from 1841 to 1845. On 16 August 1841, the *Rochester Daily Democrat* noted: "The 2d Regiment of Artillery, lately stationed at Buffalo, passed through this city on their way to New York, under command of Col. BANKHEAD. The force consisted of eight companies on board of fourteen boats . . . . The forward boats made a little tarry at the Exchange Street bridge; but our citizens had scarcely an opportunity to exchange salutations with their old acquaintances—the officers and soldiers of Capt. LOWD's company* [E]—formerly at duty at this place, owing to the difficulty of procuring horses to tow their boats as rapidly as the forward division moved. The troops all appeared in good health and spirits, and we saw no indication of a departure from their relish for cold water, contracted while among us. [i.e., they were all sober.]"

During the Civil War, the installation was used as a prison for Confederate soldiers and Yankee bounty jumpers. On 1 December 1868, civilian workmen used one of the fireplaces to heat coffee. Sparks from the faulty chimney caught on the roof, spread to temporary scaffolding, and then destroyed everything except the outer walls, powder magazine, and quarters before being brought under control by firemen from the city. Only a caretaker was stationed there at the time; the nearest troops were at Fort Hamilton. The *New York Times* reported: "The fire was still smouldering among the ruins at noon today. The soldiers were engaged in the somewhat tedious task of extinguishing it with small buckets, but without any apparent effect. Among the ruins are several unexploded shells . . . . The men are therefore afraid to stay too near the place, and so well they might be, judging from the effect of those shells which have exploded. Some three or four . . . made sad havoc with the immense iron doors, bursting large holes through them as if they were paper, and passing far beyond the limits of the fire. One shell came clear over the walls and lay in broken fragments on the docks."

The unrestored works were used for several years afterwards for the storage of ordnance materials, under the care of a sergeant.

* Also given as Capt. DOWD in the *Report of the War Department,* 1844.

WEST POINT, NEW YORK

Fortifications authorized by the Continental Congress were begun in 1778 on the west bank of the Hudson River, 51 miles above New York City. The new "West Point" became the center of American fortifications along the Hudson in the later years of the Revolution. In 1794 a military school was established there for the instruction of the new Corps of Artillerists and Engineers. The building burned down two years later, and school was suspended until 1801. On 16 March 1802 Congress authorized the creation of the United States Military Academy at West Point.

About 100 acres of the public lands were used for military purposes. Buildings included the cadets' barracks, mess hall, and hospital; academic buildings, administration offices, hotel, and professors' and officers' residences; soldiers' barracks and hospital; married soldiers' and employees' quarters; ordnance laboratory; sheds, storehouses, schoolhouse, and workshops. All buildings were of brick or stone.

Life for the enlisted man was not easy even at West Point, the model of "life back east" frontier soldiers devoutly wished for. An official report of the Committee on Police to the Board of Visitors at West Point, dated 15 June 1852, recounts: "The sleeping quarters . . . deserve to be noticed, as being altogether the most uncomfortable and unwholesome places we have ever met. They consist of two small rooms in the attic, next to the very roof of a small, dirty old building hardly one story high, located in a low, hollow place, along which must necessarily run all the filth drained from the surrounding grounds. We were astonished at the utter want of anything like comfort thus extended to those poor fellows; and that, too, from present necessity, for there is no other house for them. Twenty and thirty, and even more of them, are crowded, in the heat of the summer, into one of these little lofts, horribly ventilated and miserable in all respects."

FORT TRUMBULL, CONNECTICUT

Early in 1777 a small redoubt of earth and stone was completed on the extreme southeast point of a peninsula which projects into the harbor of New London. The redoubt was named for Governor Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut, a staunch revolutionary patriot. In 1839 it was replaced by a small fortress. For the walls, sloping outer walls, and outworks, an irregular ledge of granite some 25 feet above the water was carefully graded. Also incorporated into one of the outworks was a blockhouse of stone, said to have formed part of the original defenses erected in 1777. When completed in 1849 Fort Trumbull was a beautiful structure, its walls of cut granite quarried a few miles distant, its arches of brick.

The local climate was described by Surgeon John Campbell, U.S. Army, in 1870 as "salubrious to a wonderful degree—not very cold in winter, though subject to severe storms from the eastward, and generally free from extreme heat in summer. The garrison has always enjoyed extraordinary exemptions from severe diseases and epidemics. A large population of the inhabitants of the neighboring country reach a great age, and the climate seems remarkably favorable to the rearing of children. Wounded patients sent here during the war recovered with great rapidity."

A few of the officers occupied comfortable casemates in the fort; the remainder of the garrison had quarters outside. In parallel lines running a short distance west from the sally port lay the officers' quarters, the enlisted men's barracks, and the hospital. The officers' quarters consisted of a block of four two-story granite buildings; the soldiers', one building of granite and one of wood. The contiguous buildings were both one story high. To the rear of these stood the hospital, a granite structure. Four detached cottages were provided for laundresses and married soldiers.

FORT MACKINAC, MICHIGAN

Fort Mackinac is situated on a bluff on the southeastern portion of the island of Mackinac, which rises on its eastern and southern shore in abrupt rocky cliffs and lies near the straits of the same name which connect Lakes Huron and Michigan. This island passed from British possession to the Americans by treaty in October 1796. U.S. troops were ousted by the former owners at the beginning of the War of 1812. The fort was occupied and abandoned by U.S. forces a dozen times through the end of the Civil War, once serving as a civil prison.

The fortifications were of stone and earthworks, inclosing about half an acre. Situated on the highest point of the island, half a mile to the rear of the fort, was Fort Holmes, built by the English around 1813 as Fort George. Inside Fort Mackinac were company barracks, a two-story frame building with a porch on the south-southeast side, fronting the parade; and a one-story frame building which held kitchen, mess room, and washroom. Officers' quarters were in two buildings: one was of stone, built in 1780–83, the oldest building on the post; the other was frame. Outside the fort was the hospital, two and a half stories high. This frame building, roofed with shingle, dated to 1860.

Inspector General George Croghan visited Fort Mackinac a number of times. On his 14 July 1826 visit, he recorded: "Clothing [is] good of its kind and received to the amount authorized by law, but neither in character nor amount suited to the wants of the soldier on a cold exposed frontier like this, especially when he is during the summer cutting in the midst of mosquitos his fire wood for the winter . . . and in the winter harnessed to sleds like a horse, to drag into his garrison through snow two feet deep, the wood . . . collected during the summer. Two pairs of boots and two pairs of shoes per year serve a soldier at Fort Mifflin, or even in the harbour of New York, but they must be of better leather than I have yet seen if they last him here."

FORT MIFFLIN, PENNSYLVANIA

Mud Island in the Delaware River, seven miles below the city of Philadelphia, was defended by American forces for more than two weeks against a determined attack by the British in November 1777. The rebuilt fort shown in the painting, completed in 1804, was named for Major General Thomas Mifflin, Continental Army. It was used as a military prison during the War of 1812 and the Civil War. Eastman, as a retired lieutenant colonel, commanded Fort Mifflin during the final year of the latter conflict.

Within the fort were commanding officer's quarters, one and a half stories of rough-coated brick, with a tin roof; subalterns' quarters, two stories of brick, with a slate roof; and company quarters, one and a half stories, also of brick and slate. The guardhouse was of wood, with a tin roof. There were also four one-story brick buildings with shingle roofs; these were used as storage and smithy.

Buildings outside the fort included the hospital, which was of wood, two stories high and roofed with shingles; and separate adjoining buildings for hospital kitchen, washhouse, storehouse, and icehouse. Col. W. Hoffman, 3d Infantry, Commissary-General of Prisoners, reported to the Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, during the Civil War: "On Thursday I visited Fort Mifflin, on the banks of the Delaware River, about seven miles below Philadelphia. It is but a small work, having at present no place of confinement for prisoners but three bomb-proofs, which have no other ventilation than by the doors, one in each, and small openings through the arches overhead. They are all entered through one door opening into halls which lead to them, and of course are dark and the air is very foul. There is a fireplace in each room at the end opposite the door, which enables them to have a fire which gives them light and heat and assists greatly in purifying the air."

FORT RICE, DAKOTA TERRITORY

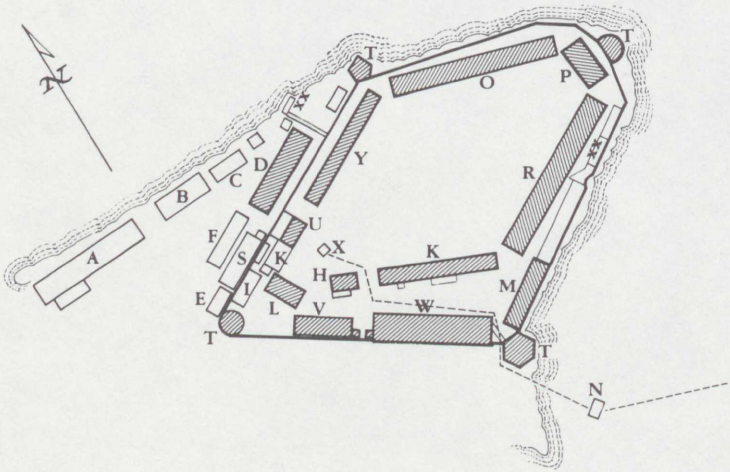
Fort Samuel A. Rice, located on the west bank of the Missouri River, six and one half miles above the mouth of the Cannonball River, was named for a brigadier general of the Union Army, a casualty of the battle at Jenkins Ferry, Arkansas, in 1864. The military reservation in North Dakota was taken from the lands of the Onkpapas, one of the tribes of the Sioux Nation. As described by the Post Surgeon, the land was "generally sterile and sparsely timbered and watered." Regarding attempts made to grow vegetables for variety in a monotonous, even deadly ration, he noted, "Drought is one of the chief difficulties, but not the only one—for what the drought spares, the grasshoppers are apt to devour."

The first buildings, erected in 1864, were rude huts of cottonwood logs, with roofs of poles and slabs covered with earth. During 1868 the fort was rebuilt, about three hundred yards from the margin of the river. As shown in Eastman's painting, it formed a quadrangle, inclosed by a stockade ten feet high. Two projecting bastions of squared and dovetailed logs were each topped by a platform and an octagonal sentry box. There were two sally ports and one main entrance fronting the river. All buildings but one were of pine frame and cottonwood, laid upon stone piers banked with clay in winter to keep the cold wind from entering through the floor. The magazine was of stone, with a sod roof and sunken floor.

The garrison suffered from a badly balanced diet. "The great amount of sickness and death at Fort Rice is terrible," General Alfred Sully reported on 13 May 1865. "Eleven per cent of [the] command have died this winter . . . . The soldiers of that garrison are composed of rebel prisoners; men who have been a long time confined as prisoners of war, and of course they are now predisposed to such sickness as scurvy and diarrhea. As soon as possible I will have a more thorough investigation of the causes. I have been obliged to order two of the companies to garrison Forts Union and Berthold. This, with the great amount of sickness, will weaken that garrison too much."

FORT SNELLING, MINNESOTA

Originally established in 1820 as Fort Saint Anthony, Fort Josiah Snelling was renamed for its first commander in 1824. It was situated on a high bluff between the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers. An irregularly shaped bastioned redoubt, the fort rested on the eastern edge of the bluff, inclosed by a nine-foot-high stone wall. Immediately inside the wall and running almost entirely about the fort was a roadway, from which stairs led at various points to the parade. All the principal buildings were of stone, arranged as shown below:



A, stables; B, gun shed; C, bakery; D, prison; E, carpenter shop; F, icehouse; H, church; I, quartermaster's storehouse; K, offices; L, magazine; M, old commissary storehouse; N, engine house; O, company quarters; P, commanding officer's quarters; R, officers' quarters; S, storehouse; T, towers; U, sutler's store; V, guardhouse; W, hospital; X, cistern; Y, band quarters; xx, sinks. Shaded buildings are stone. All others are frame.

One of the men stationed at Fort Snelling, George F. Turner, wrote the following to a friend back East, H. H. Sibley, on 11 February 1842: "We of the garrison are as usual at this season (winter) rather dull, stale & unprofitable—small parties for Tea are a good deal the fashion, & tattle is used as formerly. Indian Ball plays are coming in season. One comes off today in which stacks of property are to be invested.* The Sioux have been hunting about Rum River this winter and have killed great numbers of Dear [sic]—Our winter has been mild, one day only 30 below zero, and the rest comfortable . . . . Tonight Mumford gives a Soiree to the good folks of the garrison and this is the most exciting event of the week. What is the use of writing to you as I cannot find the wherewith to fill two pages."

* Reference appears to be to a game similar to lacrosse which certain tribes played with a leather ball. Betting sometimes literally involved "stacks of property," such as hides.

FORT SUMTER, SOUTH CAROLINA

Fort Thomas Sumter, named for a famous partisan leader of the Revolution, stood upon a sandbank near the center of Charleston Harbor. To the northeast, on the other side of the main channel, was Sullivan's Island, guarded by Fort Moultrie. The five-sided Fort Sumter was of brick, with forty-foot-high walls, eight to twelve feet thick. Because the ground was unstable, the foundations of the fort were laid upon northern granite when construction began in 1828. It was first occupied only in 1860.

Fort Sumter was the first Federal installation to surrender to Confederate forces, after having sustained bombardment for 34 hours. The report of Captain J. G. Foster, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, dated 10 April 1861, details the siege and the lack of food and ammunition that doubly threatened the defenders: "The supply of bread failed today, and its absence was supplied by rice obtained by picking over some damaged rice, which, while spread out to dry in one of the quarters, had been filled with pieces of glass from the window-panes shattered by the concussion of guns fired in practice. Shot and shells have been distributed to the guns, and about 700 cartridges reported ready. The work of making cartridge bags is slow, owing to there being only six needles in the fort."

Two days later, he reported, "The night was very stormy . . . . The enemy threw shells every ten or fifteen minutes during the night. The making of cartridge bags was continued . . . until 12 o'clock, when they were ordered to stop by Major Anderson. To obtain materials for the bags all the extra clothing of the companies was cut up, and all coarse paper and extra hospital sheets used."

Fort Sumter suffered further damage from attacks in April and September of 1863, and what was left of the fort was demolished soon after the war to make room for alterations and repairs.

Two other paintings by Eastman show the ruins of the fort.

FORT TAYLOR, FLORIDA

Fort Zachary Taylor was situated on the southwest shore of Key West Island, near Whitehead's Point, and about one mile from the center of the city of Key West. Building began in 1845, but the work was still incomplete on 8 October 1850 when the name was selected to honor the new president, a hero of both the Seminole Indian and Mexican Wars.

Violent storms and the lack of brick and granite building material, which had to be brought in by boat, continued to hold up progress. When the Civil War came the effects were little felt on the Keys, even though Florida had seceded, because the Union retained control of the sea. Another enemy, however, attacked Fort Taylor. Epidemics of yellow fever struck every year, crippling the work force and forcing partial evacuations. Assistant Surgeon W. R. Cornick, U.S. Army, described his treatment in 1862 as follows: "As soon as the patient is attacked with symptoms of the fever he is placed . . . in a hot bath containing from four to eight ounces of mustard until he gets into a profuse perspiration or complains of being faint; he is then put to bed between blankets and fifteen to twenty grains of calomel [containing mercury] are administered, followed in four hours by an ounce or two of castor oil. . . . ten grains of quinine every hour . . . after which five grains every two hours until he complains of ringing in the ears . . . . sweet spirit of nitre to keep the kidneys in good working order . . . . one drop of creasote [distilled from wood tar] in the form of a pill . . . . If the patient complains of much uneasiness about the stomach I generally resort to sinapisms [mustard plasters] . . . ."

Although Fort Taylor had been garrisoned by Federal troops since 1861, work continued sporadically until 1866, when construction was suspended. Completed structures included quarters for five companies, hospital, guardhouse, and bakery, which were built into the casemates of the fort. Officers' quarters were partly in casemates and partly in brick structures over the casemates, on the land or gorge point.