

FORT MCKAVETT

— STATE HISTORIC SITE —

Fort McKavett, Texas

Pre-Visit Guide

High School

Overview: A Destiny Fulfilled

During the 1840s and 1850s, there were dramatic changes to the American landscape as the U.S. Army played a pivotal role as a guardian of westward expansion. In preparation for a visit to Fort McKavett, students will learn about the fort's construction, the important work of troops stationed at frontier forts, the concept of Manifest Destiny, and the expansion of the United States under James K. Polk's presidential administration.

U.S. History Since 1877 TEKS

(12) Geography. The student understands the impact of geographic factors on major events. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze the impact of physical and human geographic factors on the settlement of the Great Plains.

(13) Geography. The student understands the causes and effects of migration and immigration on American society. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze the causes and effects of changing demographic patterns resulting from migration within the United States, including western expansion.

(29) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

(A) use a variety of both primary and secondary valid sources to acquire information and to analyze and answer historical questions; and

(B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing and contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations, making predictions, drawing inferences, and drawing conclusions.

(D) use the process of historical inquiry to research, interpret, and use multiple types of sources of evidence;

(H) use appropriate skills to analyze and interpret social studies information such as maps, graphs, presentations, speeches, lectures, and political cartoons.

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Materials

- Historical images for display/distribution
- *Polk the Expansionist* primary source materials

Vocabulary

- **Manifest Destiny:** the idea that the United States not only had the right to expand across the continent to the Pacific coast, but that it had a responsibility to do so, since it was considered to be “God’s will.”

Historical Context

By the late 1840s, white settlers were pushing the line of settlement further west. Western expansion was a greater United States movement as Americans began moving from the settled eastern states, across the prairie territories, and toward territories in the western frontier. This movement west was supported by an idea called “Manifest Destiny.” Sparked first by mapping expeditions ordered by Thomas Jefferson in the early 1800s, Manifest Destiny was the belief that the United States and its settlements should stretch from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast by any means necessary. This belief justified the displacement of Native Americans from their tribal lands by white settlers moving west onto the plains.

James K. Polk, in his run for the presidency in 1844, promoted the expansion of U.S. settlement into the west. He was largely responsible for the annexation of Texas as a state in 1845, the Oregon Treaty with Great Britain, and gaining all western territories at the victorious close of the U.S.-Mexican War. At the end of Polk’s four-year term, U.S. lands had increased by almost 1.2 million square miles, a more than 60 percent increase. However, the doubling of U.S. national lands was not without complication, controversy, or opponents. The annexation of these new territories enflamed the divisive debate over the creation and admittance of new slave states.

In 1848, migration west was further fueled by the California Gold Rush. Thousands of settlers took to the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails to cross the continent. Two roads from San Antonio to El Paso, the Upper and Lower Emigrant Roads, took settlers through west Texas. In early 1852, the U.S. Army established Fort McKavett west of Fort Mason and approximately 181 miles from San Antonio on the Upper Road. Soldiers stationed at the fort were responsible for providing safe escort to travelers, mail carriers, and wagon trains heading west into frontier territory.

As the line of white settlement pushed further west into Native American lands and migratory routes, native peoples struck back in attempts to protect their ways of life. (see Trans-Mississippi Indian Wars map)

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Activity: Mapping Westward Expansion

15 minutes

Display or distribute the **1839 and the 1850 U.S. maps**. Preview the map elements including title, labels, insets, and citations.

Give students time to study both maps to determine how elements in the documents visually display the reality of westward U.S. expansion. Share responses.

Primary Source Activity: Polk the Expansionist

25 minutes

Distribute the *Polk the Expansionist* primary source documents and the Primary Source Questions and Document Graphic Organizer activity sheet. Have students work individually, in pairs, or in small groups to critically analyze each document and complete the activity sheets. Share responses.

Extend the activity by encouraging further research into the key policies and events referenced in the primary sources.

Answer Key:

1. Answer will vary.
2. Government protection, increased speed of land development, general safety of the southwest frontier
3. Oregon
4. Political opposition to Texas' entry to the U.S. Depicted opponents include (left to right) Henry Clay, Theodore Frelinghuysen, Daniel Webster, Henry A. Wise. In the cartoon, Polk is depicted along with Sam Houston (in the boat) and Stephen F. Austin (waving the flag of the Republic).
5. Polk
6. Freedom's Champion
7. the document titled "Oregon" under Polk's elbow
8. New Mexico, upper California
9. Answers will vary but may include women's suffrage and slavery.
10. Answers will vary.

Assessment

Evaluate student participation and printouts for completeness and understanding.

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In-Class Extension: Alternate History

Alternate history is an increasingly popular genre in fiction and in television/film. After studying Polk's success in promoting and advancing the U.S. landscape through the concept of Manifest Destiny, ask students to re-imagine the trajectory of the United States had he never won the presidency.

Take-Home Extension

Tell students to create a **KWL Chart** to take home. Have them complete the "What I **K**now" and "What I **W**ant to Know" columns about Fort McKavett. After completing all pre-visit preparations and the on-site field trip, have students complete the "What I **L**earned" column for learning assessment.

Additional Resources & Extensions

The Portal to Texas History

<https://texashistory.unt.edu>

The Handbook of Texas Online

<https://tshaonline.org/handbook>

Oregon-California Trails Association

<http://southern-trails.org/trail-map/newtrailmap>

Texas Beyond History by University of Texas "Timeline of Texas and the Western Frontier"

<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/forts/36-44.html>

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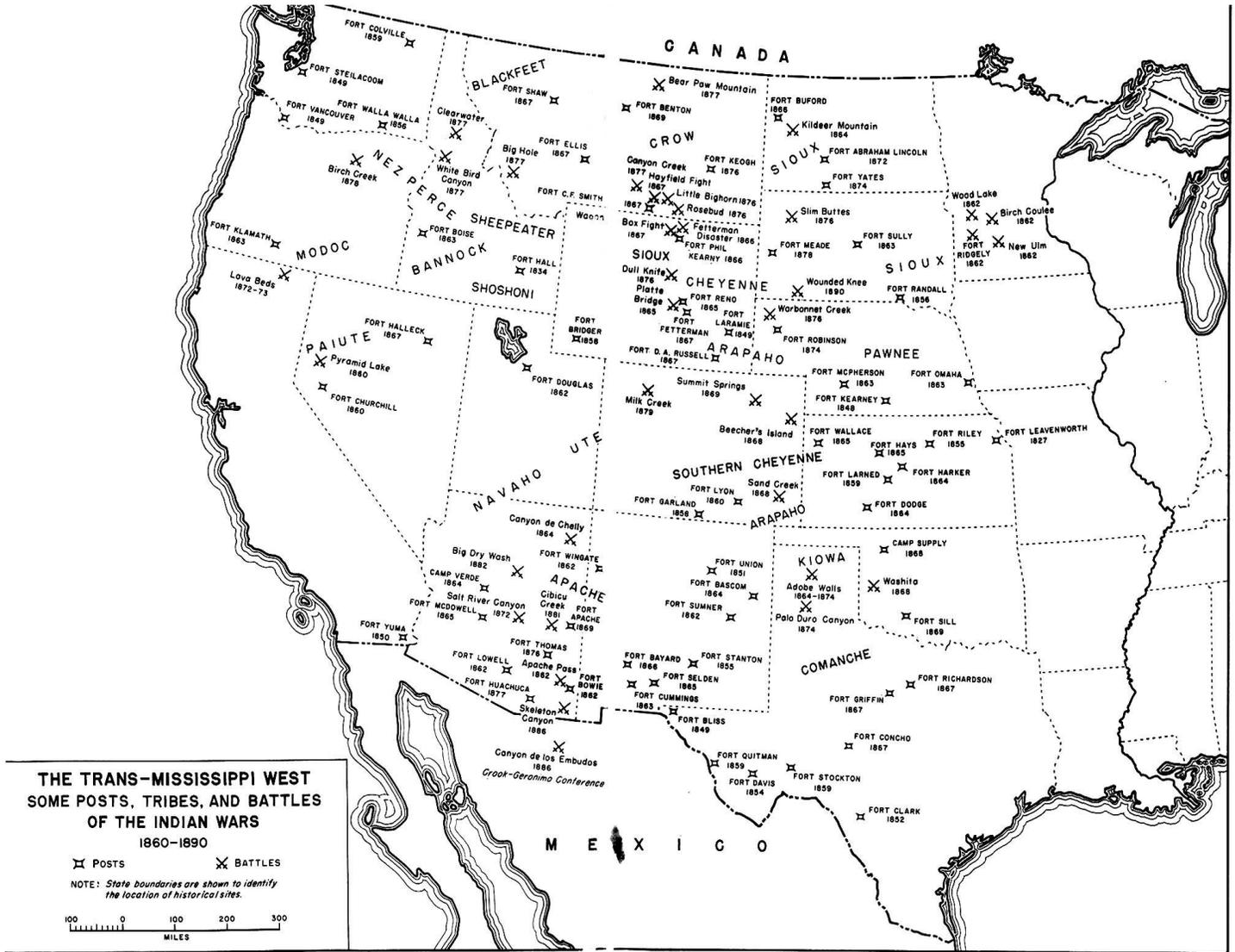
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Resource Map: Trans-Mississippi Indian Wars, 1860-1890

Citation: [The Trans-Mississippi West](#) Some Posts, Tribes, and Battles of the Indian Wars, (1860-1890) Map. Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin. https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/indian_wars_1860-1890.jpg (Accessed April 30, 2018).



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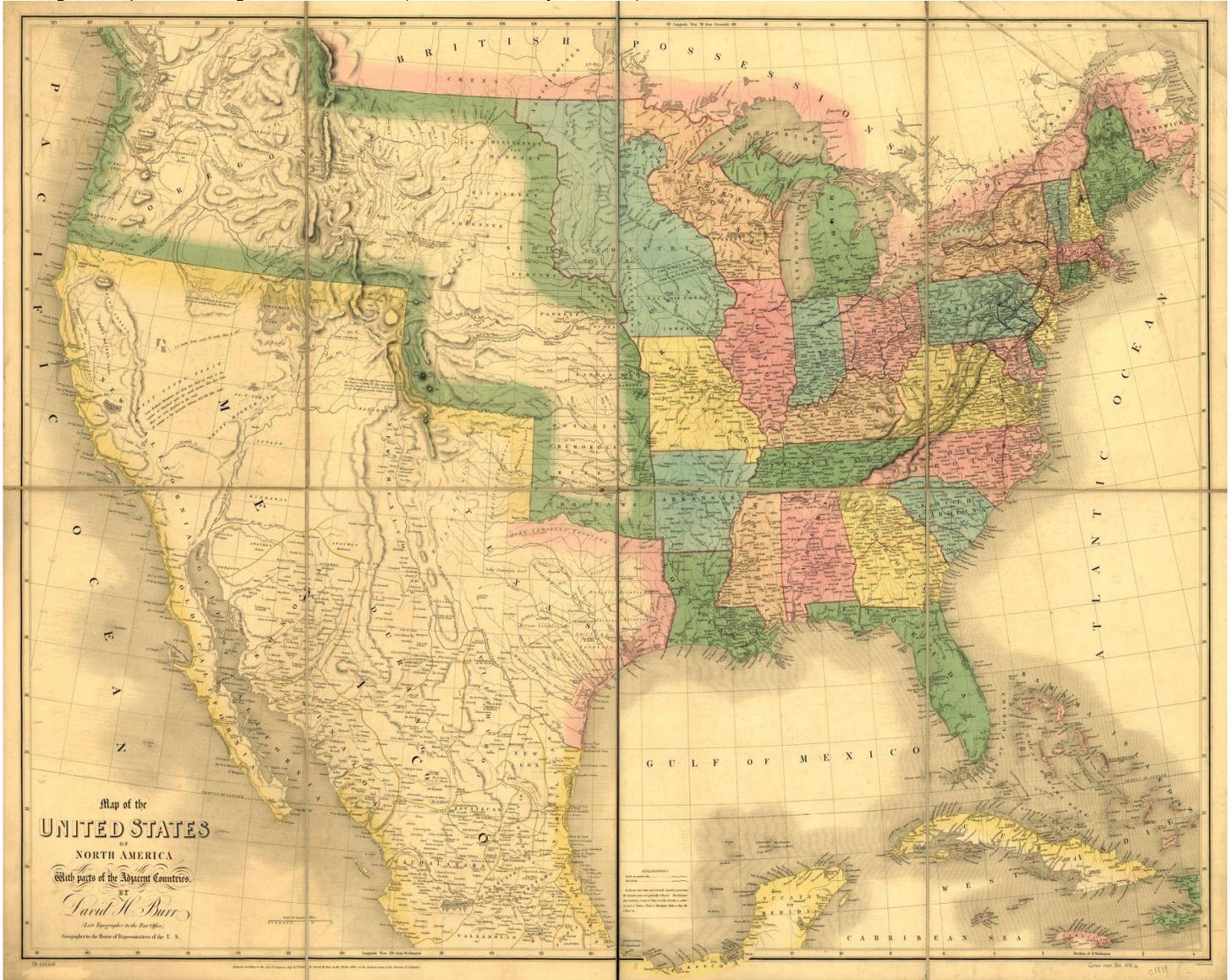
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Activity Map: U.S. Map, 1839

Citation: Burr, David H. *Map of the United States of North America with parts of the adjacent countries.* (London, 1839) Map. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/98688304/>. (Accessed January 29, 2018.)



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March 4, 1845

“The Republic of Texas has made known her desire to come into our Union, to form a part of our Confederacy and enjoy with us the blessings of liberty secured and guaranteed by our Constitution. Texas was once a part of our country--was unwisely ceded away to a foreign power--is now independent, and possesses an undoubted right to dispose of a part or the whole of her territory and to merge her sovereignty as a separate and independent state in ours. I congratulate my country that by an act of the late Congress of the United States the assent of this Government has been given to the reunion, and it only remains for the two countries to agree upon the terms to consummate an object so important to both...

To Texas the reunion is important, because the strong protecting arm of our Government would be extended over her, and the vast resources of her fertile soil and genial climate would be speedily developed, while the safety of New Orleans and of our whole southwestern frontier against hostile aggression, as well as the interests of the whole Union, would be promoted by it.

In the earlier stages of our national existence the opinion prevailed with some that our system of confederated States could not operate successfully over an extended territory, and serious objections have at different times been made to the enlargement of our boundaries. These objections were earnestly urged when we acquired Louisiana. Experience has shown that they were not well founded. The title of numerous Indian tribes to vast tracts of country has been extinguished; new States have been admitted into the Union; new Territories have been created and our jurisdiction and laws extended over them. As our population has expanded, the Union has been cemented and strengthened. As our boundaries have been enlarged and our agricultural population has been spread over a large surface, our federative system has acquired additional strength and security. It may well be doubted whether it would not be in greater danger of overthrow if our present population were confined to the comparatively narrow limits of the original thirteen States than it is now that they are sparsely settled over a more expanded territory. It is confidently believed that our system may be safely extended to the utmost bounds of our territorial limits, and that as it shall be extended the bonds of our Union, so far from being weakened, will become stronger...

Nor will it become in a less degree my duty to assert and maintain by all constitutional means the right of the United States to that portion of our territory which lies beyond the Rocky Mountains. Our title to the country of the Oregon is "clear and unquestionable," and already are our people preparing to perfect that title by occupying it with their wives and children. But eighty years ago our population was confined on the west by the ridge of the Alleghanies. Within that period--within the lifetime, I might say, of some of my hearers--our people, increasing to many millions, have filled the eastern valley of the Mississippi, adventurously ascended the Missouri to its headsprings, and are already engaged in establishing the blessings of self-government in valleys of which the rivers flow to the Pacific. The world beholds the peaceful triumphs of the industry of our emigrants. To us belongs the duty of protecting them adequately wherever they may be upon our soil. The jurisdiction of our laws and the benefits of our republican institutions should be extended over them in the distant regions which they have selected for their homes.”

Citation: James K. Polk: "Inaugural Address," March 4, 1845. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*.
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25814>.

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Primary Source Image: James K. Polk illustration, 1846

Citation: James K. Polk. Freedom's champion, ca. 1846. May 16. Print. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003664114/>. (Accessed January 30, 2018.)



Engraved by JAMES H. WELLS. Printed according to the original of 1846 by James Polk in the Clerk's Office of the U.S. Dist. Court of the South District of Texas. 201 ALLEN ST. NEW YORK, N.Y.

JAMES K. POLK.
FREEDOM'S CHAMPION.

123.

Reprinted in the Clerk's Office for the S. Dist. of Texas May 16, 1846.

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Primary Source Resource: Excerpt from James K. Polk's State of the Union Address, December 5, 1848

“Peace, plenty, and contentment reign throughout our borders, and our beloved country presents a sublime moral spectacle to the world...

Occupying, as we do, a more commanding position among nations than at any former period, our duties and our responsibilities to ourselves and to posterity are correspondingly increased. This will be the more obvious when we consider the vast additions which have been recently made to our territorial possessions and their great importance and value.

Within less than four years the annexation of Texas to the Union has been consummated; all conflicting title to the Oregon Territory south of the forty-ninth degree of north latitude, being all that was insisted on by any of my predecessors, has been adjusted, and New Mexico and Upper California have been acquired by treaty. The area of these several Territories, according to a report carefully prepared by the Commissioner of the General Land Office from the most authentic information in his possession, and which is herewith transmitted, contains 1,193,061 square miles, or 763,559,040 acres.”

Citation: James K. Polk: "Fourth Annual Message," December 5, 1848. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/fourth-annual-message-6>.

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Document Organizer

Use this graphic organizer to analyze the Polk primary source documents.

Document Title	Date	Main Idea or Event	How this document demonstrates Polk's expansionist ideology

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Polk Primary Source Investigation Activity

Analyze the Polk primary source resources to complete this activity.

Inaugural Address excerpts, March 4, 1845

1. Reread the address and **underline** or **highlight** all references to U.S. expansion or Manifest Destiny.
2. According to Polk, why was “reunion” important to Texas?
3. The U.S. title to what country was “clear and unquestionable”?

Texas Coming In, political cartoon, April 3, 1844

4. What is the main idea of this political cartoon?
5. Who is the only person depicted as supporting Texas’ entry?

James K. Polk illustration, 1846

6. What title is Polk given in this illustration?
7. What element of the cartoon shows Polk’s involvement with another new territory?

State of the Union Address, December 5, 1848

8. At the time of this address, what new territories had been added to the U.S. by treaty?
9. Consider the United States in 1848. Why might “peace, plenty, and contentment” not be entirely reflective of the state of the country at the time?

Primary source documents

10. What challenges did you experience in using and analyzing primary source documents for historical information?

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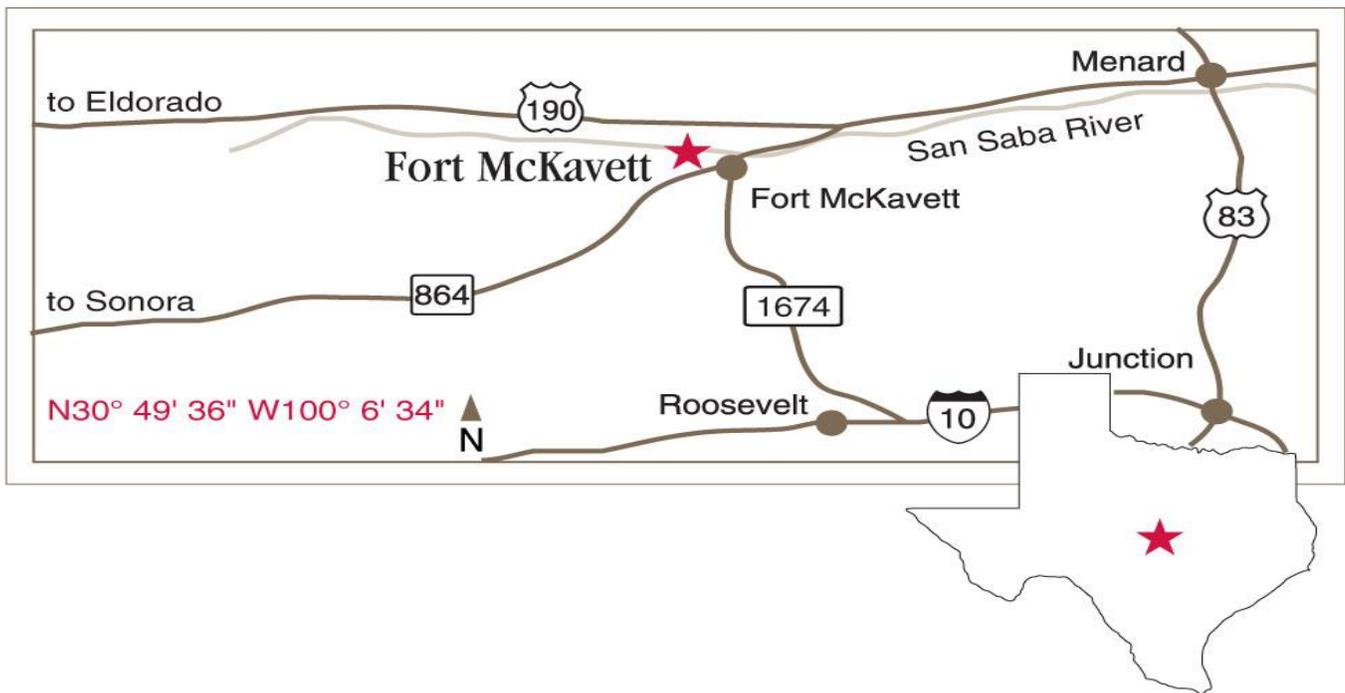
Site Visit Recommendations

- Complete the pre-visit lesson or other introductory lessons prior to your field trip.
- Divide students into small groups, each with an adult chaperone.
- Make sure students bring pencils. Pens and markers are not allowed in the exhibits.

Information

To schedule a site visit field trip for your students, please call 432-836-4391, or complete a reservation form on our website.

For admission prices and hours of operation, please visit us online at <http://visitfortmckavett.com>.



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