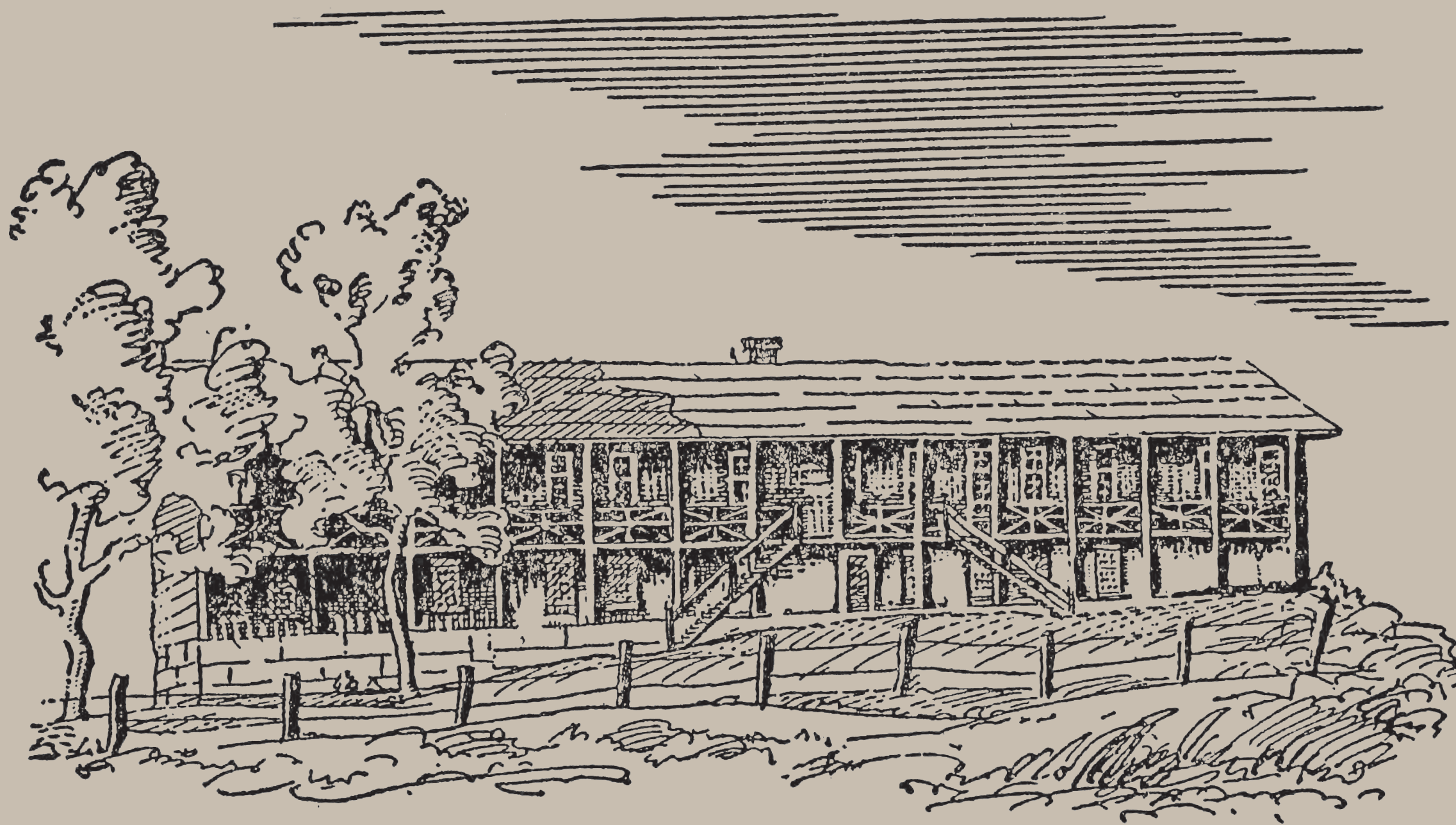


FORT GIBSON NATIONAL CEMETERY



Barracks at Fort Gibson. Fort Gibson: A Brief History, by Grant Foreman. Copyright 1936 University of Oklahoma Press. Reproduced with permission. All Rights reserved.

Civil War Fort Gibson

The U.S. Army established a post here in 1824 and named it for Col. George Gibson, the army's first commissary general. Thirty-three years later, the federal government turned the fort over to the Cherokee Nation, which established a town at this site.

Soon after the Civil War began in 1861, Confederate troops seized the old fort. Union forces regained possession in early 1863, and by mid-April approximately 3,150 soldiers were stationed at Fort Gibson. Troops included three regiments of Indian Home Guards, four companies of Kansas cavalry, and a battery of artillery. The 1st Kansas Colored Infantry joined them soon after. Strategically located on the Arkansas River and a military road, Fort Gibson became the most important Union stronghold in Indian Territory (Oklahoma).

On July 1-2, 1863, Fort Gibson troops engaged a Confederate force that threatened supply wagons at Cabin Creek. They clashed again July 17 at Honey Springs, the largest Civil War battle in Oklahoma. It was the first time black soldiers in regimental strength carried out a successful offensive against Confederate troops.

National Cemetery

Soldiers and family members who died at Fort Gibson were buried in one of three small post cemeteries established between 1824 and 1857. Most died from accidents or disease—the fort endured several yellow fever epidemics. When the U.S. Army abandoned Fort Gibson, it left the cemeteries in place.

Reoccupation of the garrison during the Civil War meant more interments. In 1868, a new Fort Gibson National Cemetery was established on land formerly part of the larger military reservation. It was laid out in four sections with a central officers' circle and flagpole. In 1871, there were 2,123 graves in the cemetery—156 known Union soldiers and 1,967 dead associated with the post.



Undated view of cemetery showing private headstones in the officers' circle. National Archives and Records Administration.



Second Empire-style lodge and wall, 1903. National Archives and Records Administration.

In 1872, Secretary of War William W. Belknap directed the quartermaster general to relocate the dead from Fort Washita, Fort Towson, and Fort Arbuckle in southern Oklahoma to this cemetery. The remains of Union soldiers from other battlefields and sites in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri were eventually reinterred here, too. By 1874, the cemetery contained 2,296 graves, of which only 194 were known.

The U.S. Army permanently abandoned Fort Gibson in 1890, but retained control of the 7-acre national cemetery. It was enclosed by a sandstone wall that matched the Second Empire-style lodge completed in 1878. This lodge, which housed the superintendent and his family, was replaced by a Dutch Colonial-style brick structure in 1934. An administration building now occupies the site.