



**Today's Fort Chadbourne!** *Garland and Lana Richards, along with many contributors, volunteers, and employees, have done an amazing job restoring Fort Chadbourne. The Enlisted Men's Barracks is shown above. The restored end and the portion that has not yet been restored.*

**Ft. Chadbourne is First Settlement in Coke County**

*[Editor's Note: The following article appeared in the 1964 Diamond Jubilee Edition of the Bronte Enterprise dated September 3, 1964.]*

Fort Chadbourne, Texas, was established October 28, 1852, one of ten such forts, for the protection of settlers against hostile Indians. It was abandoned by the U. S. troops March 23, 1861, upon the approach of the Civil War and again occupied May 25, 1867. It was finally abandoned by U. S. Troops between December 1 and 18, 1867. This information is in the files of Mrs. Jessie Yarbrough and came from the office of the Adjutant general in Washington.

The fort was built in the northeast corner of what is now Coke County, on a flat, wooded promontory on the east bank of Oak Creek, 30 miles above its juncture with the Colorado River. It is nine miles north of Bronte and six miles south of Blackwell on the old Butterfield Trail. It was an important station on the Butterfield Overland Stage Route from

1858-1861.

The fort was named in honor of Lt. Theodore Lincoln Chadbourne, killed at Resaca de la Palma, May 9, 1846. Lt. Chadbourne was 24 years of age at the time of his death. A principal street in San Angelo and the town of Fort Chadbourne also bear his name, as does the oil field on the present Conda Wylie Ranch, now called Chadbourne Ranch.

Comanche raids seemed to have been worst in the late 1840's and early 1850's. After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in which the U. S. agreed to restrain the Indian raids, a Captain Whiting, inspecting the frontier in 1850, recommended heavier garrisons and the location of Indian forts "where the Indians live instead of where the citizens live." The ten forts were then constructed with Fort Chadbourne as an extreme outpost. The site was never owned by the government but they held a 99 year lease on the site, the Felix Sosa Survey, No. 302, Coke County. In addition the government agreed to pay surface damages and this agreement was recorded April 15, 1854, Bexar transcript to

Runnels County.

The base of supplies was San Antonio, 215 miles away. Before the Butterfield Overland mail, a supply train left Fort Chadbourne once weekly for Fort Mason, 120 miles southeast, to receive the mail.

A Lt. Col. W. A. Freeman reported following an inspection of 1853 that almost "the entire command is living in tents. Two or three officers occupied "jackal" huts. Dr. Ebenezer Swift and his wife spent their entire residence at Fort Chadbourne in a "tent."

Stone buildings, when completed included officers quarters, a hospital barracks for enlisted men and mail station. The buildings had shingle roofs, shingles said to have been cut by the troops on the San Saba River

more than 100 miles away. Other buildings were of hewn logs with canvass roofs and windows. Still others were said to be tents.

The Fort had 18 commanders in less than four years. Among the officers prior to the Civil War (1852-1861) were: Captains John Beardsley, who established the fort; Arthur T. Lee, William R. Montgomery; 1st Lts. James C. Snelling, Thomas G. Pitcher; Second Lts. R. I. Dodge, R. G. Cole; Colonel John Garland; Major Pitcairn Morrison; Lt. Col. W Seawell; 1st Lts. James Longstreet and Geo E. Pickett, both of whom became famous as Confederate leaders. Miles W. Koogh was at Fort Chadbourne in 1867. Capt Henry E. McCulloch and his First Texas Calvary were there at the

outbreak of the Civil War, after it was abandoned by federal troops. They remained there only a short time and left the fort in command of a Capt. Davidson, who was killed in a fight with the Indians in 1861. Two years after the Civil War it was again garrisoned by U. S. troops but only for a short time.

Many famous men, including Robert E. Lee, Earl Van Dorn, Colonel Johnston and others either visited or were there a short time. Lee, stationed at Camp Cooper, and two companies of men traversed the Valley of the Colorado in what is now Coke County twice in the summer of 1856.

Horse racing was a favorite sport at the Fort, often racing against the Indians.

The Fort was used as an outpost but never used by the military after 1875. In 1876, Colonel Odom moved his family to the site and it has been in that family ever since. Mr. and Mrs. Conda Wylie live in the ranch home adjacent to the ruins of the Fort and Mrs. Wylie, former Edna Odom was born there.

The Fort Chadbourne cemetery, adjacent to highway 158, is another historic spot, one of the three cemeteries in that vicinity before 1877. The one near the highway is still in use. It holds the grave of the first officer to be buried at Fort Chadbourne and citizens buried as early as 1878. A number of other graves are also scattered around the Wylie Ranch, many unmarked and unknown.

Chadbourne was a ghost fort before the eighties, when most of the early settlers came out here and now the old fort is

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