

*The San Antonio To El Paso Overland Mail
Across West Texas, 1868 - 1886:
A Journey In Historical Archeology*

*The Concho Stn, Head Of The Concho Stn, Centralia Stn,
Middle Stn, Ficklin Ferry Crossing, and Pecos Mail Stn*





The West Texas Archeological Society is an organization of avocational archeologists and historians interested in re-discovering lost history in the West Texas Region known as the Trans Pecos and the Concho Valley. This covers the southern border and Rio Grande area, up to Midland, and the western Concho Valley. Our projects mainly cover the historic period. Our projects use archeological procedures with deep-source document research. Our reports are provided to universities, professional publications, and historical archival centers interested in this region. This website is our effort to make those reports, videos, and events available to the general public.

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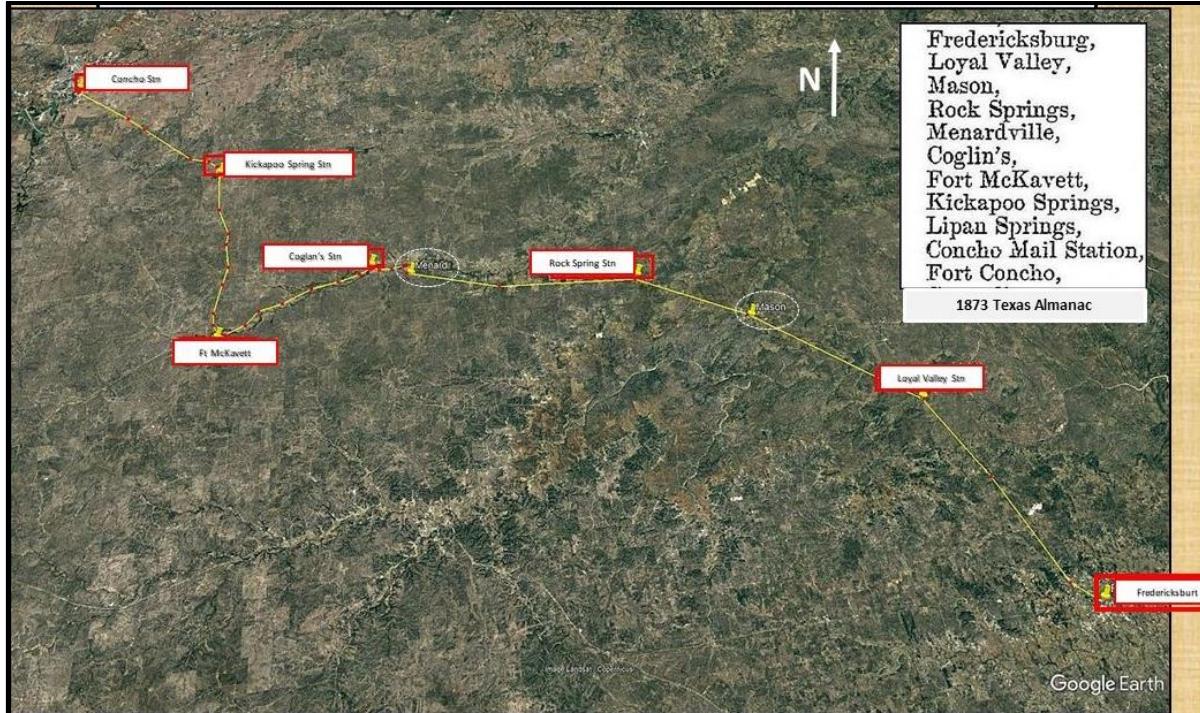
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History Of the San Antonio To El Paso Overland Mail

When Benjamin Ficklin obtained the mail contract in 1867 for the San Antonio to El Paso overland mail route, he was immediately ordered to build a new route through the recently established Fort Concho, on the Concho River. He created a route through Fredericksburg and Fort McKavett, then to the Concho Mail Station, three miles from Fort Concho, which he made the route's headquarters. He made the Concho Mail Station the headquarters for this route. He began constructing the route immediately, and it was ready to begin operations in March 1868. Since the route was for government-contracted mail, he was required to service all forts and camps along it. Of course, any of the small, growing towns needed to be included so that he could add passengers and service U.S. post offices in those towns.

The first leg of this route he sent to Leon Springs, now part of San Antonio proper, to Boerne, and to the growing German community of Fredericksburg, northwest of San Antonio. The following two towns were Mason, which included the soon-to-close Fort Mason, and Menard. Between these locations, he installed swing stations at Loyal Valley and Rock Spring, and after Menard, Coghlan's Farm. From Coghlan's Station, the route veered southwest to reach Fort McKavett, an essential fort for both military and west-bound emigrant travelers of the period. Then, the route swung north to the next swing station of Kickapoo Spring Station, before arriving at the headquarters of the route, Concho Mail Station.



Route from San Antonio To Fort Concho

EL PASO MAIL COMPANY'S LINES.

EL PASO DIVISION—F. C. TAYLOR, MANAGER.

1. Leave San Antonio for El Paso, via Leon Springs, Boerne, Fredericksburg, Loyal Valley, Mason, Rock Spring, Menardville, Coglin's, McKavett, Kickapoo Springs, Lipan Springs, Concho Mail Station, Fort Concho, Centralia, Camp Melvin, Fort Stockton, Fort Davis, Fort Quitman, Toro, San Elizario, and Ysleta, tri-weekly from San Antonio to Concho, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 8 A. M., and semi-weekly from Concho Mail Station to El Paso on Monday and Thursday, on arrival from San Antonio, and connecting at Concho with line to Jacksboro, via Camp Colorado, Fort Griffin and Fort Belknap, and on to Sherman.

2. Leave Austin for Fredericksburg, via Dripping Springs and Blanco, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 6 P. M., connecting at Fredericksburg with main line to Concho and El Paso.

3. Leave San Antonio for Eagle Pass, via Castroville, Dhanis, Uvalde and Fort Clark, on Tuesday and Friday at 6 A. M.

Average rate of fare about twelve and a half cents per mile. Average rate of freight about eight cents per pound per hundred miles, currency. Passengers allowed sixty pounds of baggage free.

DISTANCES ON THE ABOVE LINES.

From San Antonio to Leon Springs,	19 miles,
Boerne,	30 miles.
Fredericksburg,	70 miles.
Loyal Valley,	95 miles.
Mason,	115 miles.
Rock Springs,	127 miles.
Menardville,	155 miles.
Coglin's,	161 miles.
Fort McKavett,	177 miles.
Kickapoo Springs,	202 miles.
Lipan Springs,	212 miles.
Concho Mail Station,	232 miles.
Fort Concho,	235 miles.
Centralia,	305 miles.
Camp Melvin,	340 miles.
Fort Stockton,	395 miles.
Fort Davis,	475 miles.
Fort Quitman,	609 miles.
Toro,	649 miles.
San Elizario,	678 miles.
Ysleta,	684 miles.
El Paso,	700 miles.

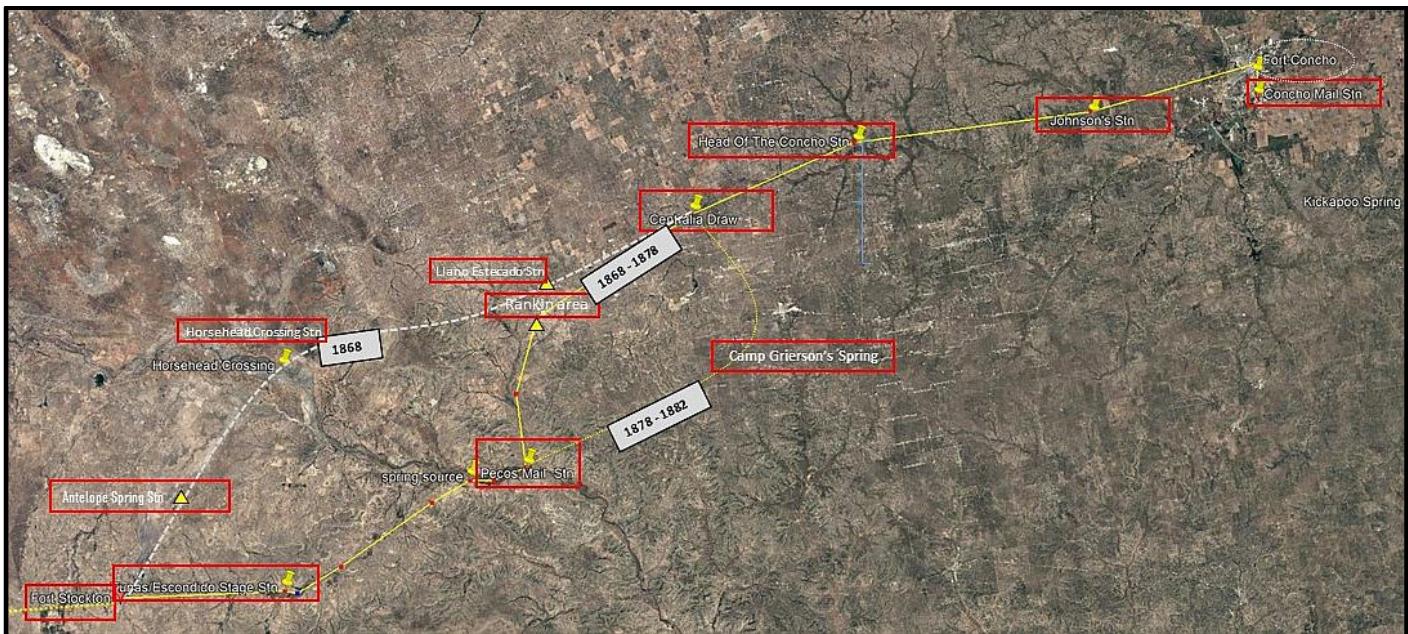
The Concho Mail Station



Concho Mail Station, 1878 (colorized)

The Concho Mail Station was the headquarters of the Concho Division of the 'San Antonio to El Paso Stage Line.' The stage line was nicknamed the Ben Ficklin Stage Line after the primary owner and founder of the line, Benjamin Ficklin. It was located three miles south of Fort Concho, San Angelo, Texas. Although the mail line began service through Fort Concho to El Paso in March of 1868, the station was not founded until around January 1869 when Ben Ficklin bought 640 acres along the Concho River. (Barton) Although we are not sure when the critical infrastructure was completed, we can assume it was between mid- and late 1869. The station ended in 1882 when a great flood swept through the area of the mail station and the nearby town of Ben Ficklin, wiping both off the map. At the time of the flood, the town of Ben Ficklin had about 600 residents and a new \$18,000 courthouse. There were at least 65 deaths, and a majority of the town's structures were swept away, effectively ending the town. (Edgin)

The mail station site, including a military camp, covers an area of about three acres just south of the Concho River. Stagecoaches ran three times per week between San Antonio and Concho Mail Station/Fort Concho. They ran two times per week from the Concho Mail Station/Fort Concho and El Paso, via Fort Stockton. (See Appendix A) Later, they increased this section to three times per week. A second line from this station ran from the Concho Mail Station/Fort Concho to Fort Smith, Arkansas, using the old Butterfield Route. (Allen)



Route from Fort Concho To Fort Stockton during various periods

The Concho Mail Station was the division headquarters, requiring a significant number of support people and structures. In the 1870 census, 31 people were listed as workers. (See Appendix B) In addition to two corrals, there was a blacksmith shop, wheelwright and paint shops, a harness storage and maintenance building, sheds for coaches, a commissary, a mess hall, and multiple picket houses for the employees. The manager and later owner's residence (Francis C. Taylor) was constructed of stone quarried nearby. The station itself was an adobe-type structure. (Green)

An inventory taken at the Concho Mail Station in 1876 included eight teams of four horses, eight teams of four mules, three teams of two horses, and four teams of two mules. For coaches, there were three nine-passenger coaches, three six-passenger coaches, three four-passenger coaches, and two horse hacks. (Barton, Clemens)

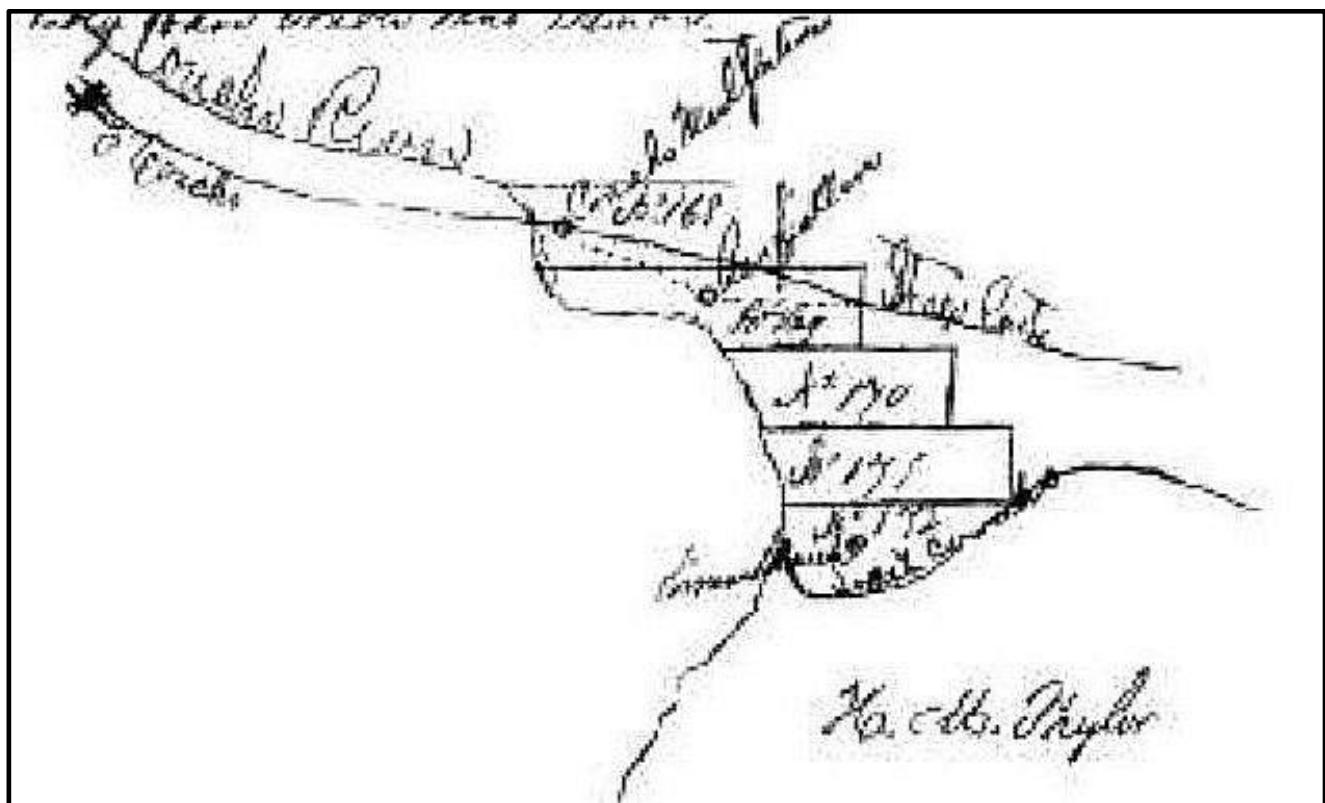
Satellite Imagery Analysis, Research, Site Reconnaissance

Although satellite imagery analysis of the roads leading to the station is the most significant factor in determining the exact location, we also used documentation to validate it. The first document is a historic hand-drawn map of the station and its relation to the river (Clemens). This map matches the analysis location.



Comparison of hand-drawn map and current location through satellite imagery analysis (Google Earth)

Additionally, a hand-drawn map by F.C. Taylor shows the road leading to the station as well as the road from the station to the town of Ben Ficklin, matching the roads seen in the imagery.



A hand-drawn map by F.C. Taylor of the proposed town of Ben Ficklin, with Mail Station and roads.

The stagecoach coming from Fort McKavett up to the Concho Mail Station from the south first entered a tree-lined road, which remains essentially intact today, acting as a border between the current highway and the adjacent agricultural field.



Tree-lined stagecoach road coming from the south (Google Earth)

As it approached the station from the south, the primary road went around a wide, shallow draw. For the road to Fort Concho, a crossing was built especially for the stagecoach. Large flat rocks were placed to make an in-water bridge. The swale of the road goes to a cut bank and down to the flat, across an old island, then across the man-made crossing.



Roads To Concho Mail Station (Google Earth)



Color-enhanced satellite image of crossing point

The station sat on the western edge of a flat, level area. Within 30 feet to the west of the stage station building is a 60-foot-wide, 10-foot-deep draw. This draw continues around the compound, encircling the entire stage station site, and merges with a drop-off on the north side facing the river. This stage station area was probably chosen for two reasons: 1) its proximity to a spring about a quarter mile away, and 2) its proximity to a shallow rocky crossing area north of the site to get to Fort Concho, three miles north. All structures are now long gone, having been chiefly wood and adobe structures, and swept away by the 1882 flood. It is now overgrown with Prickly Pear Cactus and Mesquite. **(See Appendix C for a newspaper account of the flood at the Mail Station)**



Stagecoach Crossing Below Station (Note: all flat rocks)

This wagon trail down to and across the river provided a much easier slope for the passengers than using the other cut banks to the Ben Ficklin low-water crossing would have. It's also likely they had a smoother crossing since flat rocks were placed to create a smooth, in-water bridge. The crossing measures 10 feet across, and a trace can be seen moving up the slope on the other side, heading north toward the fort.



Former Concho Mail Station Site

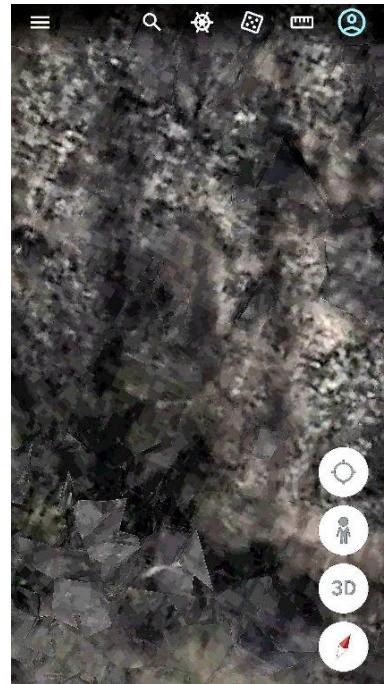
The first stop was the mail station, where passengers and mail were delivered before heading to the staging corral area to change out the mule or horse team. The stop was at the northeastern corner of the building, as seen in the (circa) 1870 photo soon after the structure was built. This is also where the coach road trace leads. A faint trace of the station building is visible from overhead 3D Google Earth imagery.



Concho Mail Station, circa 1870 (Fort Concho National Historic Landmark)

A 50 x 50-foot staging corral was built just north of the station building. A secondary road leads from the corral area to the former town of Ben Ficklin, a mile south along the Middle Concho River. A coach turnaround trace is directly in front of the staging corral, where the teams would have been changed out before returning to the station passenger point. All the stagecoach wagon roads lead to the same location – the northwest corner of the stage building – and then to the corral with a turnaround loop, validating the station building location.

According to historical documentation, the corral was initially built with eight-foot-high walls and divided into two equal sections. Between these was an open court area. Heavy posts were set inside the corral with a heavy chain strung through them. The chain hung at a height to prevent the stock animals from jumping over or getting under it. (Tom Green County Historical Preservation League) This open court would have been the team's harnessing area.



Station Building Outline (Google Earth)

The 50 x 50 space with the divided central court area is too small for the number of horses and mules known to be at this station. This is why it had to be a staging corral used only for teams to be harnessed for the current day's coaches. An additional nearby corral to the east was for all the other animals. The ground scaring shows a large corral out in the field to the east. It measures 85 feet long and 45 feet wide. The eight-foot enclosure referenced cannot be seen in the (circa) 1878 photo below. It was most likely taken down since the Indian problems were considered over at that time. However, one eight-foot post is visible in the photo and was probably from the original structure. We found another, hand-hewn post not far away. In 1873, the new station owner, Francis Corbett Taylor, also purchased Bismark Farm, about three miles west along the South Concho River, where they kept some of their horses. (Lucky) This would be proper for animals that needed rest and recuperation before returning to work.



Stagecoach at Concho Mail Station, circa 1878 (Fort Concho National Historic Landmark)



Hand-Hewn Post, Probably From Original Corral

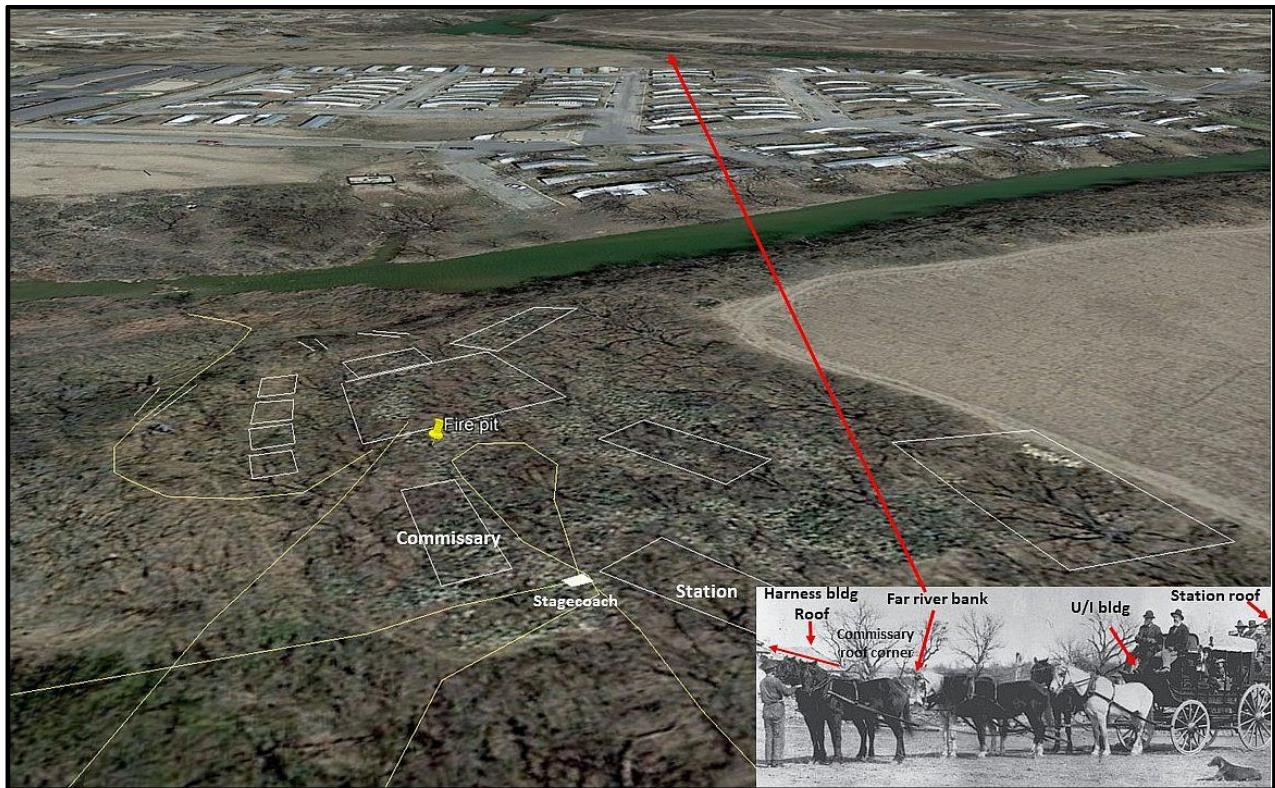
(Note that there is a similar post shown in the background of the 1879 photograph)

A second significant structure outline trace can be seen in imagery that measures 45 x 15 feet. This may be what was referred to as the commissary or mess hall. The corner of this building's roof can be seen in the (circa) 1878 photo. This was a significant building used to warehouse supplies for the entire Division's stage stations.



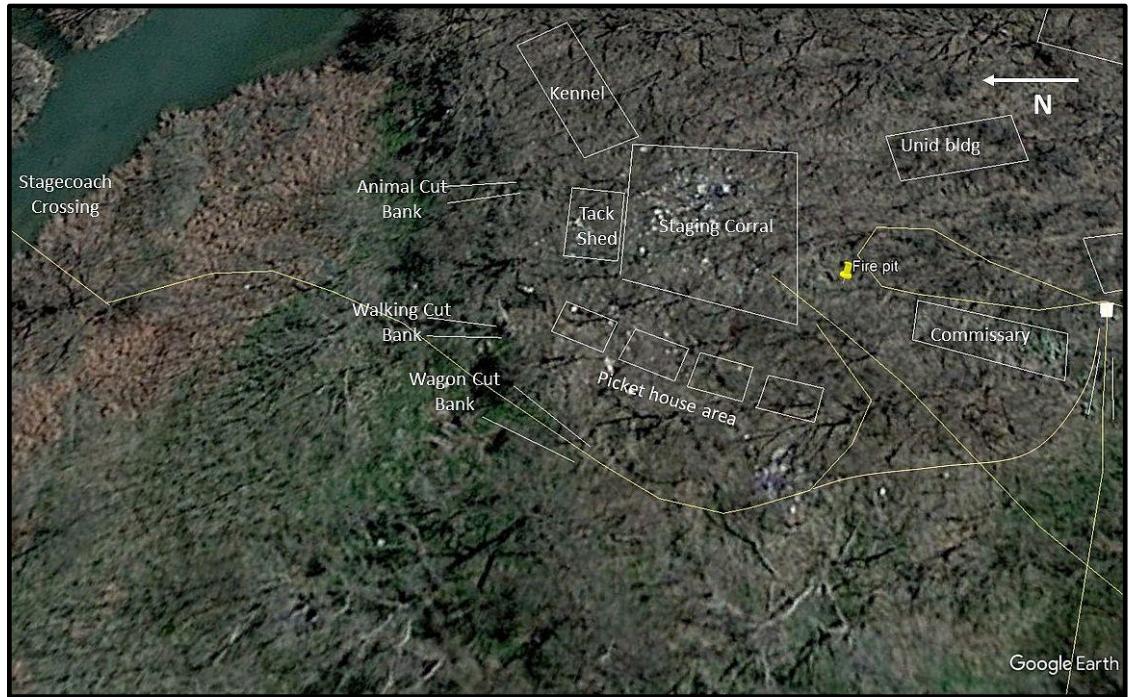
Rectangular structure across cattycorner to stage station, likely commissary (Google Earth)

By comparing the (circa) 1878 photograph with the proposed analysis of the station layout, we can find five points that match. Those are the corner of the probable commissary roof over the team holder's head, the far riverbank in the distance, the harness tack building roof above the lead horses, the roof of the station behind the three passengers in the coach boot seat, and the roof outline of an unidentified building between the driver's legs. This is the most substantial piece of evidence for the correct site location and layout.



Comparison Of Five Points (Google Earth)

Although there is no trace of the reported worker's picket buildings, they were purported to be close to the corral and were likely lined along the edge of the drop-off area, in a line to the west of the staging corral. A



period trash dump was discovered behind this area in the flat by metal detectors in 2015, supporting this. Behind the corral was the tack shed, and to the back eastern side was Ben Ficklin's 50-foot racing dog kennel. (Barton)

F.C. Taylor built a substantial stone home for his family behind the station. According to the documentation, a comfortable manager's dwelling was constructed of stone quarried nearby and was regularly visited by travelers. The quarry area is less than a quarter mile across the field to the east. The home had numerous rooms and was well furnished for the times. A fine square piano graced the parlor, which had a Brussels carpet on the floor. The Taylors' library contained many interesting volumes freely loaned to friends. (Tom Green County Historical Preservation League)

Many of the stones were removed and re-purposed in later years after the home collapsed. One feature of probable repurposing is a small dam that blocks runoff water at the end of the draw below the station. However, we did find three corner areas of the building's foundation stones. It is located 20 yards east of the stage station. The measurements indicate it was 70 X 40 feet.



Stone Building – F.C. Taylor Home (Google Earth)



Re-purposed Building Stones For Dam



Stone Foundation Grouping



Stone Foundation Grouping



Piled Stones From Former Home

Most above-ground structures were wiped clean from this site in the 1882 flood. However, one likely related feature remains, located between the corral and the probable commissary. There is a square-dug pit measuring 3 x 3 feet, with a two-foot slope leading into it. The area is surrounded by fire-heated limestone, with some still in the pit walls. Very close by was a small, severely deformed shovel head. This feature was most likely a fire pit for a communal earth oven commonly called a 'rocket stove.' The shovel was probably used to remove burned-up wood charcoal, which would have severely compromised the metal over time.



Fire Pit



Severely heat-deformed shovel and solder top cans

The rocket stove is a type of cooking and heating stove that achieves a clean, high-temperature burn. Moreover, the design includes separate chambers for fuel feeding and air channeling. This optimized configuration offers efficiency gains in material/fuel use and a dramatic reduction in soot by-products. As the name implies, the rocket stove, through increased oxidation, produces a hotter, faster-burning flame, resulting in a rocket-like column of fire. The rocket stove is not a particular identifying model; rather, it is a set of design principles used in construction. The rocket stove can be constructed from a multitude of materials. The combustion chamber is a tall and narrow chimney column. Secondly, the chamber for placing material into the fire is kept low and horizontal, similar to a traditional pizza oven. Thirdly, the air inlet runs parallel to the material feeding chamber, allowing a steady, low-turbulence air supply to be drawn in just below the burning material. The efficiency comes from this constant influx of oxygen that allows for more intense combustion. The intense combustion effect enables users to burn less wood and debris. Moreover, the way in which the material is loaded allows for a very controlled burn. Quite simply, one pushes sticks into the column of fire little by little. (Smale)



Primitive Adobe Rocket Stove (example)

As important as the road structure is to this site, the cut banks in the embankments on the side of the hill are to the roads and trails. The cut banks were dug into the hillsides to reduce the slopes' steepness. Three cut banks were found for wagons, one for walking, and one for animals. These cut banks help to reveal the logic of the layout of the overall facility. Two cut banks are on the hill's west side, leading to the stage station and/or the corral. These are the two leading to and coming from the well-known Ben Ficklin low-water crossing. This crossing point is now just below the Bryant Road river crossing. The departure cut bank is angled toward the hill. This would have been to lessen the danger of going downhill in a wagon. Another cut bank sits just south of the first and was probably for those heading to the town of Ben Ficklin.

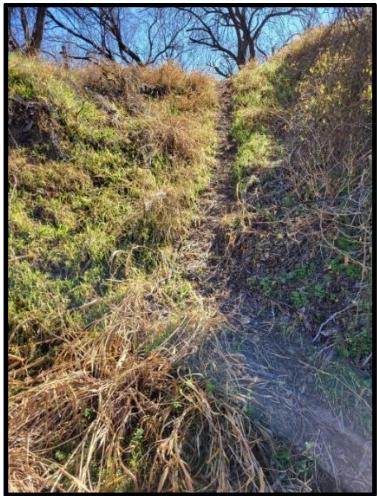


Looking Down Wagon Cut Bank (to Ben Ficklin low water crossing)

The remaining cut banks are on the north side of the compound, heading down to the flat and onto the river. The trail continued to a former island and then across the river. One cut bank was for the stagecoach. The wagon trace swale comes down from both the corral and station, winds around the middle of the hillside, just below the compound, then down the cut and onto the crossing. One narrow cut is behind the workers' residences, and it was probably just for walking. The area at the bottom of this cut is also where metal detectors previously found a period trash dump some years ago. A third cut, slightly wider than the narrow one, comes from the back of the corral and was probably for leading horses and mules down to a grazing area on the lower flat where the grass grows thicker due to the water table.



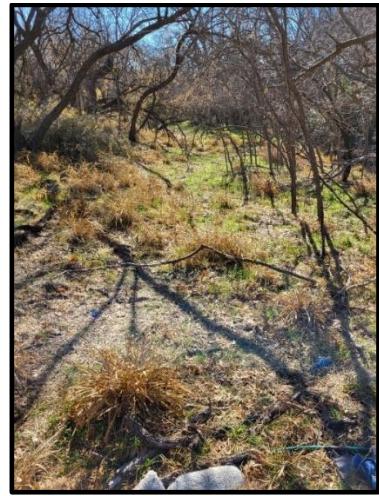
Cut Banks (Google Earth)



Walking Cut Bank



Wagon Cut Bank To Stage Crossing



Wagon Swale Around Hill

Military Detachment

Military reports show that the 24th Infantry Regiment was responsible for mail stations throughout West Texas and was headquartered out of Fort McKavett. The infantry from Fort McKavett was assigned the duties of protecting the station and stagecoaches, even when deployed to other forts. Fort Concho was designated for the area to Fort Stockton to the west and to the north on the old Butterfield road. In the early 1870s, it appears Fort McKavett was responsible for the road south and up to the Concho Mail Station.

Cavalry and infantry were detached to the camp next to the station and would ride an escort between the two locations. It's unclear whether the cavalry was from Fort Concho or McKavett in that early period, but it was a 9th Cavalry unit either way.

The earliest date for the widespread guarding of mail stations and coaches, as documented in military records, is February 1870. Interestingly, this may not have been long after the stage station construction was completed, since the land Benjamin Ficklin purchased for the mail station site was finalized on January 18, 1869. The detachment for the section of road to Fort McKavett was camped just outside the Concho Mail Station compound, along the river. This was determined by analyzing ground scars and a large number of artifacts found in a cluster across this area, including many infantry and some cavalry buttons. Fort McKavett was home to the 24th Infantry Regiment during this period. They also housed two cavalry Troops of the 9th Cavalry Regiment, headquartered at Fort Stockton. (Texas Beyond History) Both units were Buffalo Soldiers. Their main duty in the early 1870s was to protect mail stations and escort stagecoaches.

“The principal duty of the command in western Texas was to open up and protect the mail and stage route from San Antonio to El Paso; to establish law and order in the country contiguous to the Rio Grande frontier, which had been sadly interfered with by Mexicans as well as Indians during the Civil War; to prevent marauding by Indians and to capture and confine to their reservations all roving bands; to help pave the way for the western advance of civilization, and to add their part in the great work of opening to settlement the vast resources of the great West.” (Hutcheson)

Military records from both Fort Concho and Fort McKavett indicate that units from both locations were involved in both guard duties and mail escort duties for the road between Fort McKavett and the Concho Mail Station. However, the records are unclear about when and how the overlap in responsibilities was coordinated. One report from Fort Concho in October 1871 clearly shows that in that month they provided seven guards to the “Concho Mail Station” and an unknown number of cavalry for mail coach escort. In this one single report, they referred to the Concho Mail Station, Taylor’s Ranch, and the “mail station near Fort Concho,” all for the same place. ‘Concho Mail Station’ and ‘mail station near Fort

Officers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1st Lieadbourne							7
Johnson's Station							4
Head of Concho							3
Bismarck							7
Concho Mail Station							
TOTAL	6	10	2	1	1	12	98

*The command has furnished during the month the necessary mailies-
carts, twice each week to Mountain Pass and Fort Stockton, three times each
week to Taylor's Ranch, also the usual guards to the mail stations at Fort Chadbourne
Johnson's Station, Head of the Concho, and the mail station near Fort Concho.*

Fort Concho Military Report

Concho' were used when referring to infantry guards and 'Taylor's Ranch' (i.e. F.C. Taylor) was used when referring to cavalry escort duties.

Notably, Ben Ficklin died of a medical emergency on March 10, 1871, while in Washington, D.C. F.C. Taylor was thereafter in charge of the mail operation. After Ficklin's death, the contract for this service was awarded to Ficklin's partner, F. P. Sawyer, with F.C. Taylor managing the operation. Sawyer operated the line through June 1875. (Stever)

From the number of military artifacts found in a very specific area by the metal detector group, we estimate the area of the military camp covered to be around 250 x 100 feet along the river east of the station compound. As stated earlier, the artifacts also indicate that both infantry and cavalry were assigned to this detachment. The standard military detachment of this type would be infantry guarding the camp and corral, with both cavalry and infantry performing the escort duties.

In analyzing the area identified by the metal detector group on Google Earth, there also appears to be ground scaring that matches the area described. Additionally, it appears to be a small circle that is still visible in 2021 imagery and sits in the center of this area. This was probably a flagpole location.

The agricultural ground was left fallow from 2015 to 2022, and vegetation began to grow back naturally, which usually indicates the outlines of long-term occupation, whether in the form of buildings or tents. In this case, the 2021 imagery shows perfect rectangles in rows on both sides of the flagpole area. The east side tents measure out to 9 X 6 A-Frame tents, and on the west side is two rows of 6 X 6 A-Frame tents. There are only six of the larger tents, which are directly in front of the corral area. This indicates that these were cavalry tents. Note there is also a trail (light-colored area) going from this area over to the stage station area. One military account from 1869 describes a mail coach escort (unrelated to this particular road section) consisting of five soldiers from the 9th Cavalry Regiment who defeated an attempt by 20 Indians to stop the coach. (Hutcheson) Smaller escorts could be used, depending on the perceived threat.



Military Camp In Relation To Station (Google Earth)

There appear to be nine smaller 6 X 6 tent traces on the west side. These were probably infantry. Two of these appear to be within a 15 X 15 tent fly. This would logically be the sergeant and corporal tents.

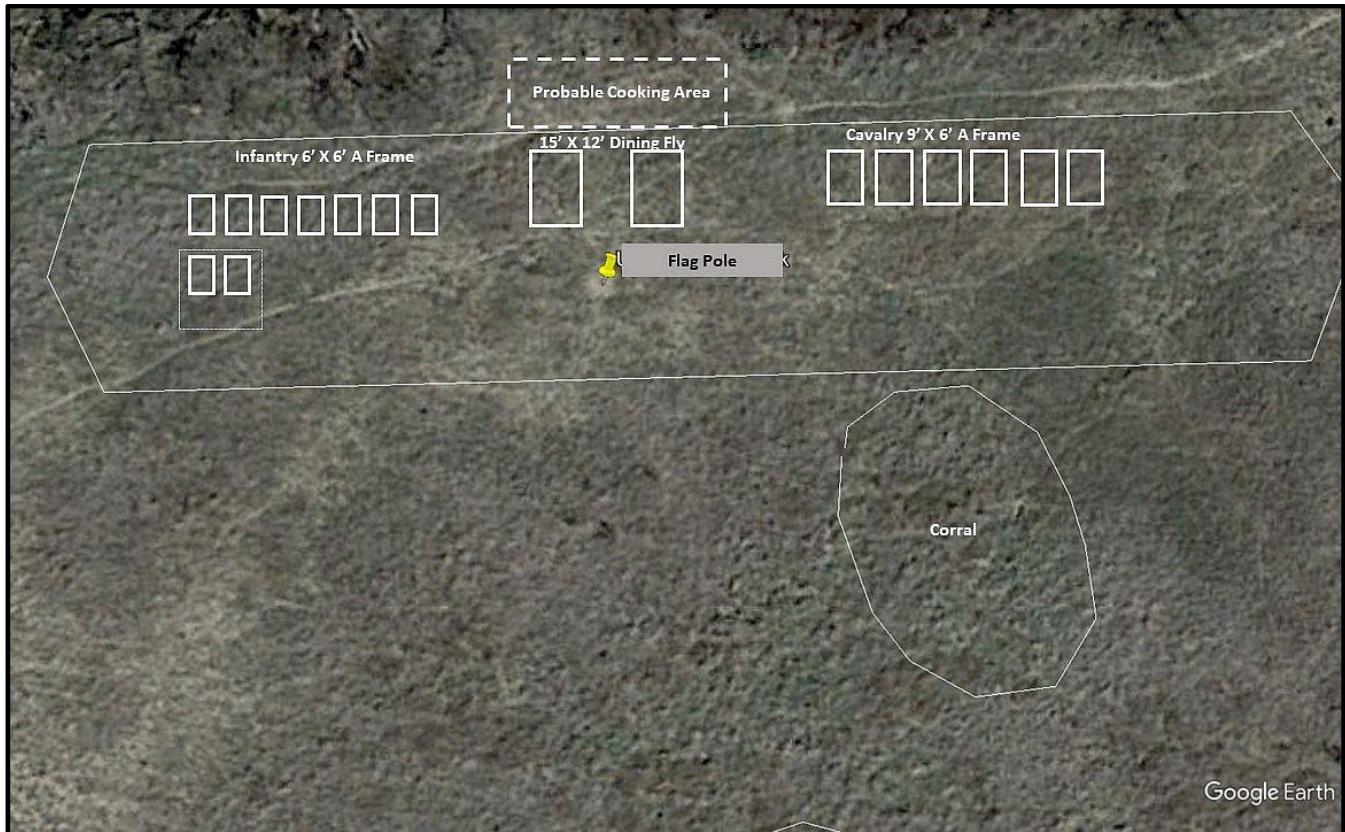
Walking trails can be seen leading away from these two areas on each side of the camp. Two large rectangles in the center and on each side of the flagpole are 15 X 12, indicating these were open-air dining fly tents.

A corral was directly adjacent to the military camp area. Military horses were never allowed to be mixed with civilian horses. Thus, the corral had to be separate from the mail station corral. And this is what the ground scaring shows.

There is no official documentation of when the military camp at Concho Mail Station was abandoned.

Twenty-fourth Infantry units detached to Fort Concho appeared to be responsible for the camp in at least October of 1871. The 24th Infantry moved out of Fort McKavett in 1872, and there were no further reports of mail protection activities in the post's monthly reports. In January of 1873, equine influenza swept through the horses and mules in the state of Texas, and the stagecoach business stopped. It did not resume until the spring of 1873. (Barton) The military undoubtedly abandoned the camp at Concho Mail Station at this time, as monthly reports reflect. Although there were still problems up north and west through 1874, this area did not appear to be considered vulnerable. By the end of 1875, most of the Indian threat on the Edwards Plateau was over due to the outcome of the Red River War. (Cruse) It is not a definitive time-period indicator, but, interestingly, the military-contracted Scovill Manufacturing Company stopped

producing the button design found at this site in 1875. Additionally, the latest definitive government cartridge in the collection was manufactured in 1873.



Probable Military Camp Layout (based on ground scaring and cluster area of military artifacts)

Stage Station Workshops

South of the military area, ground scars are visible in imagery for the main station corral and small buildings. The corral measures 85 X 45 feet. Note in the image below that the vegetation is greener in the corral area



due to bioturbation from animal waste. The building closest to the corral would have been the blacksmith. The area outside this building is also greener, probably because of shoeing operations here. This is also where the metal-detection group found most of the blacksmithing and harness-making artifacts. The wheelwright would have been near the coach sheds, the long building in the image.

Blacksmithing items from field by metal detecting group (Horseshoe trimmings, square nails, cut nut & bolt)



Military Camp Area, Corrals, And Workshops (Google Earth)

In the image below, a trail trace is visible leading from the main stage station corral to the staging corral. This supports the location and outline of the corral in this field. The corral location supports the placement of the various buildings that would have been near the workshops. It also supports the existence and reasoning of a smaller staging corral.



Horse/Mule Trail Leading From Main Corral To Staging Corral

Artifacts

In 2015, the land lessee permitted a metal detecting club to detect the area around the fields and brush at this location. They worked weekends for approximately six months. Most artifacts were found in the adjacent plowed field to the east of the station. The massive flood in 1882 came downriver from the west, slamming into the station and spreading everything downriver to the east. Many artifacts were found buried in the field, and a few are still in the brush around the station site. They came up with a plethora of artifacts. Many of the artifacts were identified and framed in multiple display frames. Given the meticulous nature of the collection, these artifacts can be directly tied to the station and the military detachment camped nearby. For these reasons, we believe these are proper period and locational artifacts. In most cases, the specific locations of the dug items would not help identify site facilities, as the 1882 flood pushed everything east and mixed it up in the fields as they settled. However, there were a few areas where similar items were grouped enough to estimate specific areas: the military area and probable workshops, such as a blacksmith and a harness maker. The other artifacts, although they cannot be tied to a particular site feature or activity, still provide a good historical understanding of the lengthy occupation by what was essentially a tiny community of civilian workers, passengers, and military personnel.

With that, we will present and explain some of these extraordinary artifacts in these displays.





As indicated by the drawing, this frame is mostly weapons and military-related.

The left side cartridges are mostly military. The 45-70 and 50-70 were specifically military infantry. The 50-70 would have been right when the station opened, and as Fort Concho was just being built. The 45-75 was a civilian cartridge favored for big game like bison. The 56-56 was one of the first military cartridges

for the Spencer, a cavalry rifle. However, the stage drivers were also outfitted with Spencer Carbines to protect their coaches. (Barton) Later modifications were the 56-50 and 56-52. The 45 Colt and 45 Schofield were military revolver cartridges, but were also used by civilians. The 44 Winchester was one of the most popular of the civilian rifles. The revolver cartridges on the right side were all civilian.

Below the drawing is a military boot heel plate. Below that is a rifle stock strap (upside down). To the right is a harmonica reed, often found in camps of all types of the time, but quite often in military camps. The buttons above that are all Indian Wars enlisted buttons, with one metal undershirt button on top. The bottom two are coat cuff buttons. The shotgun shells are all civilian.





Top middle: lead with measuring cuts, probably for making lead balls.

Left of lead: toy gun cocking hammer and large cinch buckle

Center: thimble, probably for leather work. Below is probably lipstick case cover. Square nails on each side.

Rings are harness tack for horse and mules.

Top right: internal mechanism of clock

Bottom right: mule yoke hames

Bottom left to right: butter spreader, pocket knife, western saddle conchos

Within ring tack: Small lead balls for Cap & Ball pistols

Rivets on each side are for leatherwork, probably related to harness gear

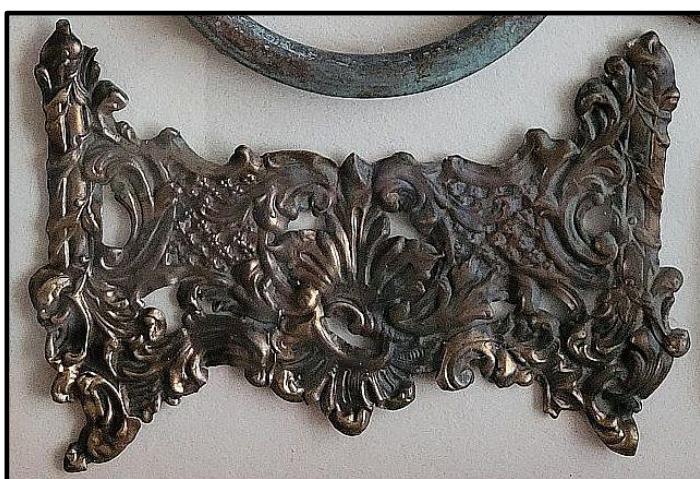
Military buttons are Indian Wars design (enlisted), Mule harness hame

Bottom center is either a from a book binding or from furniture.

One of the most interesting items in this frame of artifacts is the leather-working thimble. This thimble is engraved with the letter 'L'. The 1870 census shows that the harness maker at the time was listed as 35-year-old John Lamb, originally from New York. This was very likely his engraved thimble. The 1880 census again shows Lamb as one of the few names remaining in the area, along with the partners/owners. Based on the number of buildings, he appears to have been living at the stage station in 1870, but probably in Ben Ficklin in 1880. The census also lists him as "deaf and dumb" or unable to speak. He was an excellent harness maker since he stayed on the job so long.



The fancy plate in this frame is a curiosity. It could be for a piece of furniture, but it also could be a fancy plate for an expensive book. These plates were common in expensive books, and F.C. Taylor was known for having an extensive library at home. A close inspection shows no drilled holes for attaching to furniture. An example of this type of plate in a book is below.



Artifact plate



Example book with plate



Top rows, left to right: Saddle D ring, 12 gauge shotgun shell, gunpowder flask top, boot heel metal plate, 45 cal cartridge, shot flask top handle, possible wagon rivet, unidentified brass seal, horseshoe nail, hand-forged horseshoe, leather strap buckle

Second row, left to right: lead bullets, harmonica reed, unidentified brass with drill hole

Left side, 50-70, 45 caliber, 56-50 caliber, 44 Henry, 45-70, 44 Winchester rim fire, 56-50

Middle, left to right: Large saddle or harness ring, strap buckle, unidentified, 44 caliber extra long

Bottom, left to right: leather rivets, saddle rings, Indian Wars buttons (enlisted), horseshoe nail, military band button. Bottom lead piece appears to have tooth marking on it. To right of that is possible bugle mouth piece.



Top, left to right: harmonica reeds, leather rivets, unidentified hinge latch, saddle conchos, pieces and key to possible trunk, bent horseshoe nail, unfinished/broken hand forged mule shoe

Middle, left to right: roller buckle for leather strap, possible decorative knob for dish cover, possible top of medicine or perfume bottle, unidentified button, medicine bottle neck

Bottom, left to right: connector pin, unidentified piece, suspenders brace (patent 4850), Penny Doll (Frozen Charlotte) head, possible suspenders brace, unidentified possible small wagon wheel iron tire piece, tack strap buckle

Bottom row: pennies, dimes, and nickel (identified in next page)



The Worthington Advance, Worthington, Minnesota, 24 Nov 1899, Page 7.



1857 Flying Eagle Cent



1859 Liberty Quarter



1866 Shield Nickel



Drilled Indian Head Penny

(Coins were drilled to sew into clothes linings for emergency money)



Back Side Of Indian Head Penny

Military Buttons

All military buttons are from the Indian Wars and are enlisted. They are either general staff buttons or cavalry (identified with a C in the shield. General staff buttons were a catch-all for post-Civil War infantry. This is a sampling of the many military buttons found. The reason for so many buttons is likely the 1882 flood, which inundated the camp, by then abandoned.





Miscellaneous Buttons



Other Military Items



Boot Heel Plates and Knapsack J-hooks, Bridle Rosette



Bugler Cap Insignia

Medal plate

Jews Harp

(The Jew's harp, also known as jaw harp, vargan, mouth harp, gewgaw, guimbard, khomus, Ozark harp, Berimbau de boca, murchunga or mungiga, is a lamellophone instrument, consisting of a flexible metal or bamboo tongue or reed attached to a frame. Contrary to the name, the harp originated in Mongolia and has no relation to the Jewish people.)



Military Canteen



Bit Plate



(example)



Cartridge box plate



Example, cartridge box and plate

Miscellaneous Non-Military Artifacts



Pistol shot flask top (with example)



Coin Verification Scale Weight (2 Penny weight)



(example)

Verifying the correct weight of gold and silver coins is an age-old practice. The weighing was done on very precise scales, but until the beginning of the 18th century, it was possible to verify one ounce with maximum precision of only 0.1 grams. With an aim at improving the accuracy and sensitivity of the scales, their mass was lightened and the hinges were improved. Many new small scales were invented. In 1770, pocket scales were introduced. The scales were inside a box. Inside the box were small equal arm scales for weighing a small coin.

In 1817 with the introduction of the gold Sovereign the rocker balance was invented. These scales were balanced only if the weight of the coin was exact. It was also possible to verify the diameter and the thickness of a coin using these same scales. As of 1860, the minting of coins was much improved so that forging was nearly impossible. After a while, the merchants stopped using these types of scales, and shortly after, their production stopped completely.

https://www.gilai.com/article_21/Hanging-in-the-Balance---Antique-Scales

Concho Mail Station Conclusion

The Concho Mail Station was a significant part of West Texas history. It was not only the Division Headquarters, but also the access point for all passengers and mail coming and going from both the northeastern and southeastern areas of Texas, out into the unsettled lands and beyond. They overcame significant challenges and hardships to help expand into the area. Without this transportation hub, it is reasonable to say that San Angelo would have grown much more slowly into the county seat.

The compound itself was a community. In 1870, there were 34 civilians and 7-15 soldiers living and working on this small 3-acre piece of land. From all accounts, the business was well organized and, for the most part, received praise from its passengers. It is also a sacred ground where at least six people lost their lives during the 1882 flood. Given its significant contribution not only to the local area but also to all of West Texas, this site should be designated a historic site.



Overall Depiction Of Entire Site (Google Earth)

Appendix A

The Texas Almanac for 1873, and Emigrant's Guide to Texas **Page: 191**

This **book** is part of the collection entitled: [Texas Almanac](#) and was provided to [The Portal to Texas History](#) by the [Texas State Historical Association](#).

EL PASO MAIL COMPANY'S LINES.

EL PASO DIVISION—F. C. TAYLOR, MANAGER.

1. Leave San Antonio for El Paso, via Leon Springs, Bœrne, Fredericksburg, Loyal Valley, Mason, Rock Spring, Menardville, Coglin's, McKavett, Kickapoo Springs, Lipan Springs, Concho Mail Station, Fort Concho, Centralia, Camp Melvin, Fort Stockton, Fort Davis, Fort Quitman, Toro, San Elizario, and Ysleta, tri-weekly from San Antonio to Concho, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 8 A. M., and semi-weekly from Concho Mail Station to El Paso on Monday and Thursday, on arrival from San Antonio, and connecting at Concho with line to Jacksboro, via Camp Colorado, Fort Griffin and Fort Belknap, and on to Sherman.

2. Leave Austin for Fredericksburg, via Dripping Springs and Blanco, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 6 P. M., connecting at Fredericksburg with main line to Concho and El Paso.

3. Leave San Antonio for Eagle Pass, via Castroville, Dhanis, Uvalde and Fort Clark, on Tuesday and Friday at 6 A. M.

Average rate of fare about twelve and a half cents per mile. Average rate of freight about eight cents per pound per hundred miles, currency, Passengers allowed sixty pounds of baggage free.

DISTANCES ON THE ABOVE LINES.

From San Antonio to Leon Springs,	19 miles,
Bœrne,	30 miles.
Fredericksburg,	70 miles.
Loyal Valley,	95 miles.
Mason,	115 miles.
Rock Springs,	127 miles.
Menardville,	155 miles.
Coglin's,	161 miles.
Fort McKavett,	177 miles.
Kickapoo Springs,	202 miles.
Lipan Springs,	212 miles.
Concho Mail Station,	232 miles.
Fort Concho,	235 miles.
Centralia,	305 miles.
Camp Melvin,	340 miles.
Fort Stockton,	395 miles.
Fort Davis,	475 miles.
Fort Quitman,	609 miles.
Toro,	649 miles.
San Elizario,	678 miles.
Ysleta,	684 miles.
El Paso,	700 miles.

(Note that Lipan Springs was not a station, but a well-known topographical location. Two known stations between Fort Concho and Centralia - Johnson and Head Of Concho - were also left out.)

Appendix B

12/22/22, 9:40 AM

1870 U

1870 U. S. Census for Bexar County, Texas

Inhabitants in: Concho Mail Station in the District of Bexar, State of Texas; Post Office: Fort Concho, Texas

Date: 23 July 1870 Enumerator: Edward Donovan 1st Lt 2nd Infantry Page: 334

Transcribed by Cindy Koegel

DW#	FM#	Name	Age	Sex	Race	Profession	Birthplace
9	9	Taylor, Francis C.	47	M	W	Sup H.S.? Mail Line	GA
		Esther A.	48	F	W	Keeping House	SC
		David, Charles	45	M	W	Agent for mail line	Canada
		Morrill, Henry F.	50	M	W	Agent for mail line	NY
		Spears, James D.	25	M	W	Agent for mail line	AL
		Evans, John P.	33	M	W	Clerk for mail line	SC
		Hoffmaster, John	40	M	W	Stage Driver	KY
		Harper, James	26	M	W	Stage Driver	OH
		Brown, Timothy	35	M	W	Stage Driver	NY
		Welch, John	22	M	W	Stage Driver	OH
10		Meisner?, Christian	28	M	W	Stage Driver	Prussia
		Cane, Milton	35	M	W	Blacksmith	MO
		Scott, John	33	M	W	Blacksmith	Scotland
		Lackie, John	25	M	W	Painter	KY
		Lamb, John	35	M	W	Harness maker	NY
		Walker, Joseph	29	M	W	House Carpenter	Ireland
		Prainer?, Alfonso	20	M	W	Laborer	France
		Bobo, John	30	M	W	Stage Driver	TN
		Miner, James	30	M	W	Stage Driver	MO
		Minass, Carrillo	30	M	W	Stock Feeder	Mexico
11		Gurney, William A.	30	M	W	Stock Feeder	England
		Cook, John N.	28	M	W	Stock Feeder	IL
		Randullo?, Manuel	20	M	W	Stock Feeder	Mexico
		Anderson, Samuel	35	M	B	Watchman at Stage Station	TN
		Johnson, Gilyand	30	M	B	Laborer	TX
		Craig, William	30	M	M	Laborer	TX
		Johnson, Perry	35	M	M	Teamster	TX
		White, Willis	35	M	B	Teamster	TN
		Nix, John	35	M	B	Teamster	TX
		Jones, Thomas	28	M	B	Domestic Servant	VA
12	10	Suzan	30	F	M	Domestic Servant	VA
		Martha	4	F	M	At Home	VA
		Kitty	1/2	F	M	At Home	TX
		Wallace, George	30	M	W	Station Keeper	Ireland

[Back to Census](#)

[Back to Main Page](#)

Appendix C

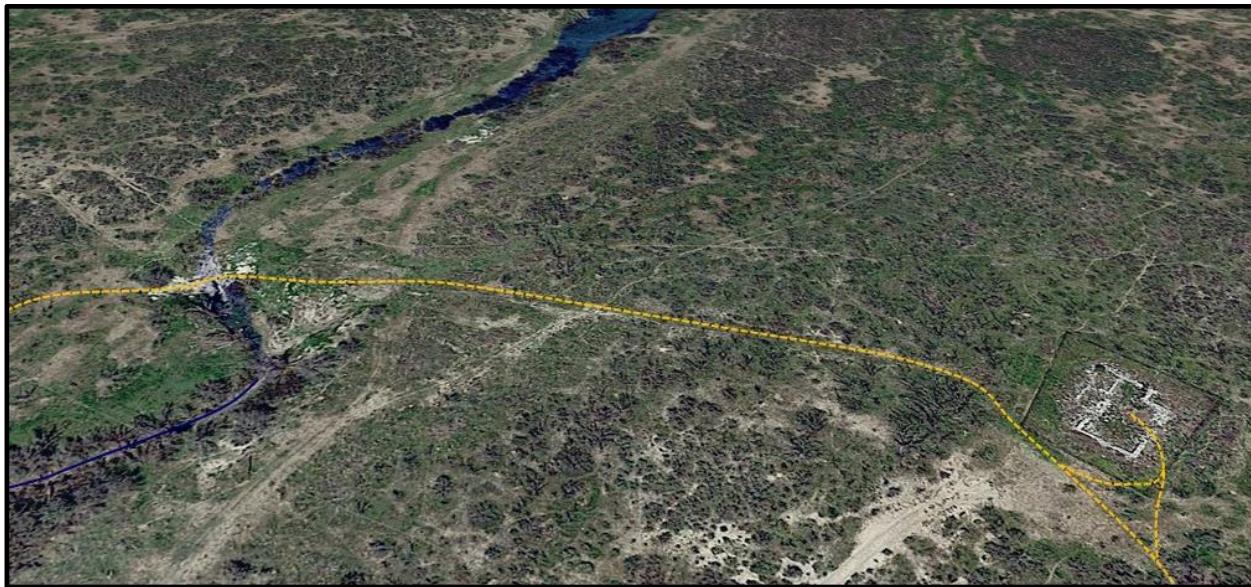
The following is a transcription from the August 26, 1882 edition of the Tom Green Times newspaper published in San Angela, Texas. Our thanks to William Caskey and the Ben Ficklin Cemetery website, Metcalfe-Spence Cemetery Historical Preservation Foundation.

...At the Old Stage Station, between this town and Ben Ficklin. Unfortunately, this place is situated on a small eminence between the river and the cliffs, about 300 yards from the latter, whose base is skirted by a deep ravine. Escape from such a position is extremely difficult in any direction a horse would swim long before the house is endangered. Mrs. M. J. Metcalfe and her family of five, Mrs. Kate Arden and two of her children, Mr. B. Taylor and daughter, Mr. Frank Lerch, who was luckily absent, and Mr. S. C. Robertson and wife, of San Angela, reside at the station. Early in the morning they discovered that their houses were surrounded and water was making rapidly toward them. Mr. C. D. Foote appreciating the danger, drove from Ben Ficklin to the station, and brought off Mrs. Arden and her two children, Miss Taylor, Misses Fannie and Amelia Metcalfe, and the two sons of Sheriff Spears. Mrs. Metcalfe, thinking the water had reached its highest point, declined to leave, and her daughter, Miss Zemula, resolved to stay with her, saying: "My place is with mother." But the waters rising, induced Mr. Robertson to drive his wife to a place of safety, which he did with some difficulty. He then returned to aid Mrs. Metcalfe and others at the station, whom he induced to enter the hack. They started but the horses balked, and no progress was possible. At Mrs. Metcalfe's suggestion they turned, and by means of a ladder, climbed on the roof of her dwelling. In this position Mr. Terrell Harris and Kerby Smith, a colored man, who had nobly resolved to rescue the unfortunate party and had left Ben Ficklin in a frail boat for that purpose, observed and passed them. Upon that roof were Mrs. Metcalfe and her daughter Miss. Zemula; Mr. S. C. Robertson; Mr. Blake Taylor, Sr.; George Robinson, chainbearer for Mr. Leach; Anselmo, a Mexican; and Red Evans, a Negro cook. The heavy boat, half full of water, capsized within ten feet of the house. Its occupants, Harris and Smith, made desperately for a grove of pecan trees, a place on the tallest of which they luckily secured. Nearby at the same time the roof with its human freight broke in two, the ladies clinging to one half and the five men to the other part. The screams of George Robinson were distinctly heard and the actions of all seen by Harris and Smith from the tree tops. Mr. Taylor lost his hold on the roof in a few seconds and was swept beyond human aid. The ladies bore down upon the pecan clump and were engulfed.

...Screaming as they disappeared beneath the drift which had rapidly accumulated within a few feet of Harris. Mr. S. C. Robertson was shaken from the roof, but caught a tree and held on through as terrible a day and night as anyone ever endured. Once the wreck of the house knocked him from his position, but he swam until he secured another. All of the party on the roof but this gentleman were lost. On Friday morning at about 6 o'clock, Judge Joseph Spence espied Mr. Robertson in his tree and took steps to rescue him. An hour later Captain Rose, U.S.A., found and relieved Harris and Smith. They were bruised and sore from contact with the drift and from their super-human exertions. The station itself an utter ruin. All the houses and walls have disappeared in a current before which stone walls melted like snow in June.

<https://www.benficklincemetery.org/august-24-1882>

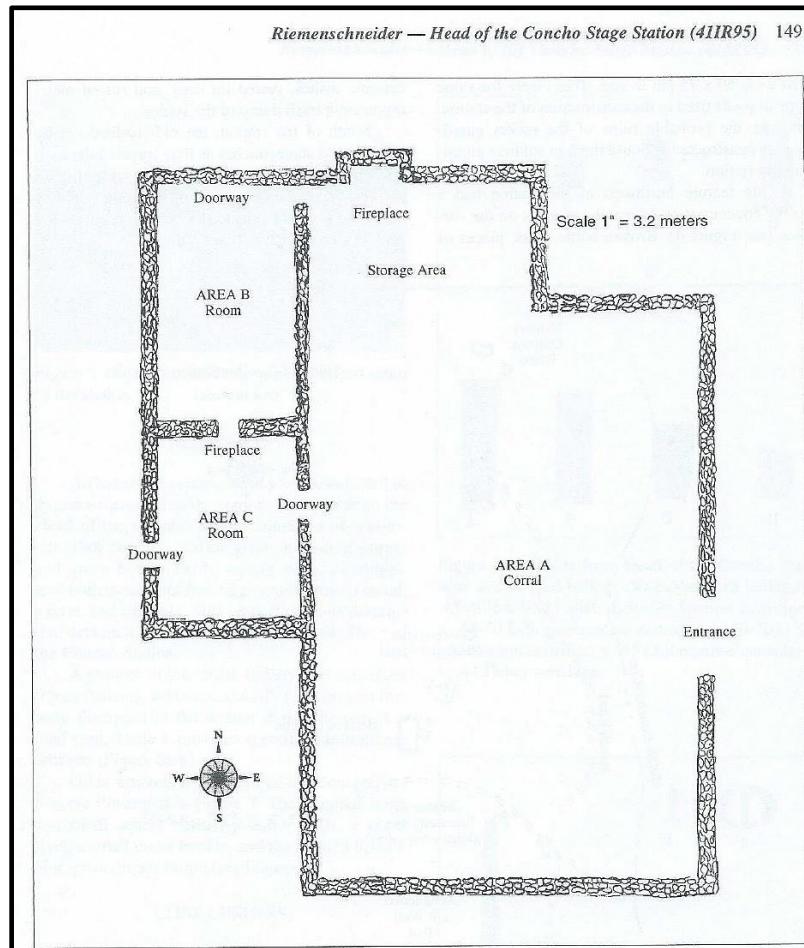
Head Of The Concho Station



The Head Of The Concho Station was originally built in 1858 for the Butterfield Overland Mail. It was abandoned at the outset of the Civil War in 1861. When Ben Ficklin acquired the new contract for the San Antonio To El Paso mail, he used as many of the former Butterfield stations as possible. The Head Of The Concho station, being built of stone, served his needs with little reconstruction.

The archeological project to record this station was accomplished in 1996. (Riemenschneider) As with all stations on the route, this station had a military picket guard, usually five to seven infantry soldiers from Fort Concho. During a short period of heightened Indian raids in the area, there was also a small cavalry detachment posted 300 yards north of the station.

Riemenschneider — Head of the Concho Stage Station (41IR95) 149



Although they maintained a picket guard on sentry duty, Indian raids were successful almost as soon as the station was up and running. In June 1869, an Indian raiding party of around 30 warriors was able to steal the

company and military stock, even with picket duty guards doing their best to fend them off. The station was again attacked in 1870, 1871, and twice in 1875. (Austerman) Although the stone-walled station was impenetrable, the company's stock of mules needed to be grazed, and that was always the target of the Indian raids.

Centralia Station



As with Head Of The Concho Station, Centralia Station was another reconstructed station from the Butterfield Overland Mail period. However, the difference is that the name was changed. During the Butterfield period, the name was the Llano Estacado Station. At the time, none of the draws were named. In 1867, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel J.D. Strang conducted an expedition from Fort Stockton to Fort Chadbourne. He took a cartographer with him and mapped the route in detail. On this map, he documented the “old Mail Station” at Flat Rock Ponds. Although the map was very detailed for all the important locations, it did not include the name of the draw they traveled through for 40 miles. He documented the distance to Wild China Ponds to the west and Head Of The Concho Station to the east. The distance to the Head Of the Concho Station was 32 miles. In 1869, another expedition, headed by Colonel Hunt, out of Fort Stockton, stated the distance from Centralia Station to Head Of The Concho Station was 32 miles. This validates that the

Camps and Stations		Miles from Fort Stockton
Fort Stockton		
Arriola Spring		11.11
Horse Head Crossing - Pecos River		22.57
Salt Lake		6.00
Horse Head Crossing - Pecos River		6.00
Gap Water Pass - Castle Mountains		12.80
Wild China Ponds		11.46
Old Stock Station - Flat Rock Ponds		15.02
Mustang Water Hole		22.53
Head of Concho		9.82

location is the same for both the Butterfield's Llano Estacado and the later Centralia Station. The military began maintaining a presence and conducting patrols in the area around 1867, about the same time the Ben Ficklin line was getting started. In June 1867, Lieutenant Boehm left Fort Chadbourne with a detachment of 40 men and followed the Butterfield Trail down to the Middle Concho River. They set up what they called 'Permanent Camp', listed as 18 miles from the junction of the Middle and North Concho Rivers. This is the location of the original Johnson's Station. They escorted cattle herds, and occasionally, stagecoaches, to the Pecos for one month, at which time they were relieved by G Company of the 4th U.S. Cavalry. (Ashmore) Thus, it was probably the military that first gave the 40-mile east-west-running draw the name Centralia Draw. It was chosen as the name of the station by Ben Ficklin when they re-established the mail route through the draw.

The station was also purported to be a stone structure. Today there is only the stone wall foundation with the old road trace leading directly to it. Flat Rock Ponds are located 800 yards east of the station, as indicated in the 1867 military map.



Ruins of Centralia Station (old Butterfield Llano Estacado Station) (photo by Bill Yeates)

Middle Station



For the stations heading west from Fort Concho, Ficklin decided to reestablish as many of the pre-Civil War Butterfield Overland Mail stations as possible. To reach Fort Stockton, he would have to cross the Pecos River at Horsehead Crossing, using the same method as Butterfield before the war. Near the Horsehead Crossing station, they would have westbound and eastbound coaches meet on each side of the river, transferring mail and passengers in a small skiff. He dispatched crews to rebuild the old stations and commenced operations in March 1868. However, only four months into the new route, the Commander at Fort Stockton ordered the Pecos River crossing to be moved farther downriver for better security. That initial new crossing became Ficklin's Ferry Crossing, 35 miles downriver. At this location, they used the same method of crossing the river as had been done at Horsehead Crossing. They used a skiff to transfer mail and passengers. (Ashmore, 2024)

Due to the new crossing point on the river, they needed a road from the old Butterfield Trail down to Ficklin's Ferry Crossing. With the help of the 9th Cavalry, Ficklin chose a location to come off the old Butterfield Trail west of the Centralia Station, formerly the Butterfield's Llano Estacado swing station, deep in the desolate 'Staked Plains.' At that point, the road passed through the north-south-running China Draw, which would take them all the way to their new Pecos River crossing. But they also needed another station within the standard plus-or-minus 25-mile stretch for changing mule teams. They were lucky to find a good water hole that appeared to be connected to a spring just after the road turned south in the draw. This was the only water anywhere in the area, and at 18 miles, it was just right for their needs. Because this location sat between the Centralia and Pecos Mail Stations, it was named Middle Station.

The general location of Middle Station was reported in October 1868 by H.G. Logan, a San Antonio Herald journalist. Logan rode a small, two-mule company mail hack from Fort Concho to Fort Stockton. In his description of the ride, he wrote of following the ruts of the old Butterfield Road along the Middle Concho River. After departing the Head Of The Concho Station, they passed Mustang Holes and then Flat Rock Ponds. Flat Rock Ponds was the site of the old Butterfield (Llano Estacado) Station, as reported in 1867 by Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Strang, on an expedition out of Fort Stockton. Ben Ficklin's mail company also reused it for one of its swing stations, and, as stated previously, this station was renamed Centralia Station, probably because it was located in the middle of Centralia Draw.



Typical light mail hack

In less than an hour past Flat Rock Ponds, they arrived at Middle Station. At that time, the mail company had not built a structure and only had a brush corral, but it did keep the troops supplied with water. (Austerman) It was at Middle Station that the road turned southwest and ran for 21 miles to the river.

On a rough, dirt road, a small two-mule hack will travel an average of three to four miles per hour. That puts L.G. Hogan and his hack at just under an hour to reach Middle Station just after the road splits heading southwest down China Draw.

The reference to water is the key to locating this lost station. There is only one water hole just after the road splits, heading toward the Pecos River. Another firsthand account, described in a 1872 Austin newspaper, during an attempt on the station by Comanches referenced the water hole adjacent to the camp that still holds water today. During the attack, the hostler's dog broke free and went after one of the Indians who was creeping up on the camp.

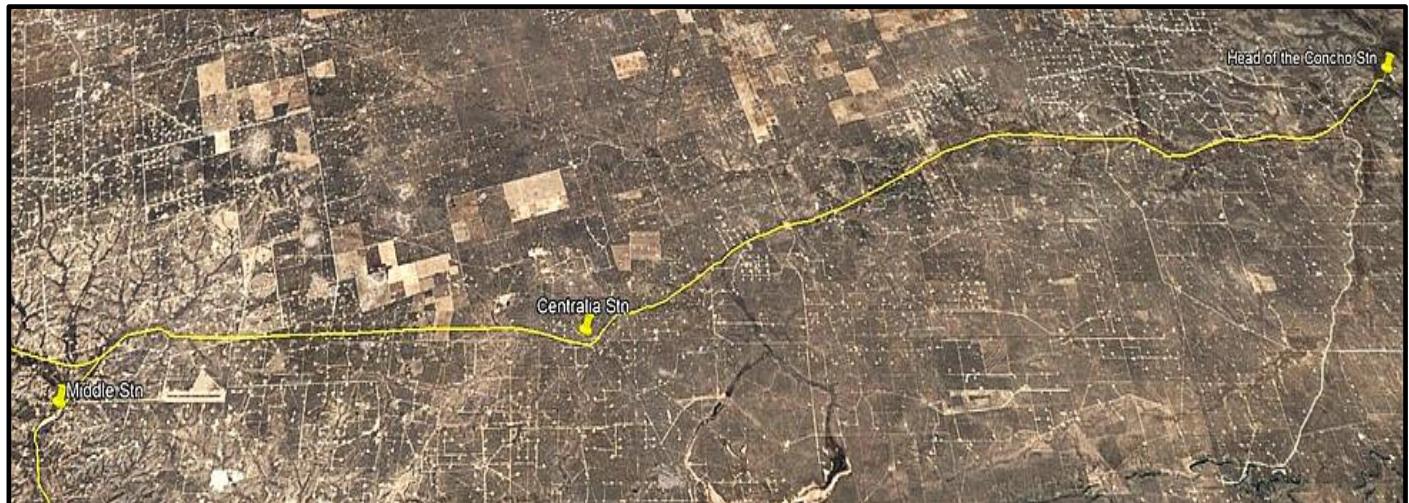
The dog chased the Indian through the “water hole” with the men whooping and cheering. (Austerman)



Satellite imagery of bermed area of compound



That water source became a key component of a ranching operation many years later, marked by numerous metal cattle pens, concrete water troughs, and tanks. The natural 250 x 50-foot pond still holds water, wrapping around what was the old swing station and Army picket post.

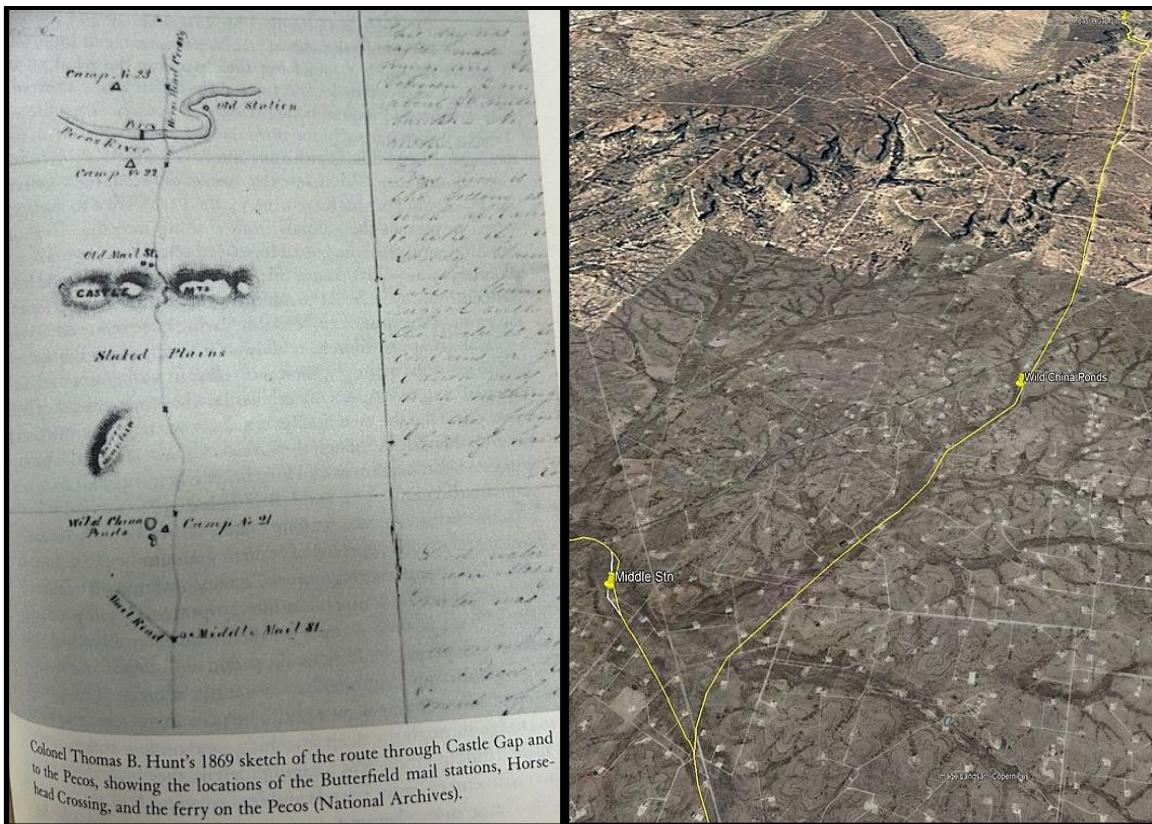


Route Overview



Main wagon road (yellow) with stagecoach access road (in white)

An 1869 map created by Colonel Thomas B. Hunt, from Fort Stockton, details the site of Middle Station, which matches the location described in this report. It shows the turn to the south off of the old Butterfield Road and the Middle Station in the vicinity of that turnoff. A distance relationship can be determined by the following location to the west, annotated as Wild China Ponds. That also matches properly with the Google Earth rendering of both places.



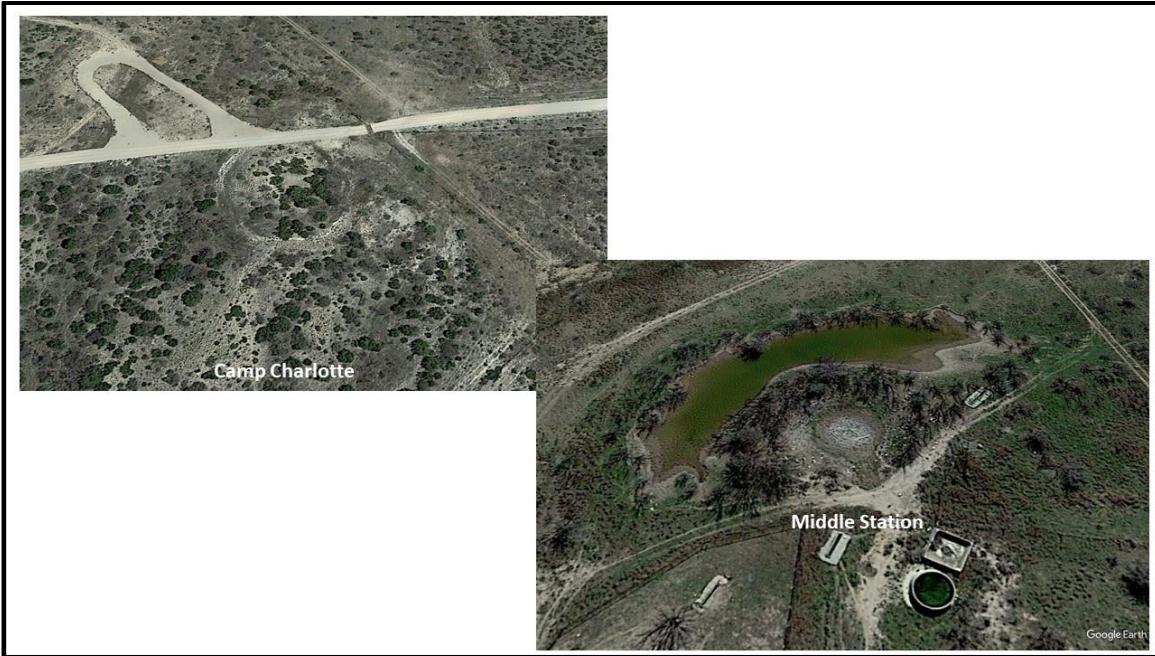
Comparison of Colonel Hunt's map and Google Earth

In July 1868, the Fort Concho post report indicates that two non-commissioned officers and 15 privates were sent to guard both Camp Charlotte and Middle Station. The guard details were from the 17th and 35th Infantry Companies stationed at Fort Concho. (Ft Concho Archives) Each NCO would have been assigned to one of the stations, and the 15 men would have been divided between the two. They did not specify exactly how many went to each location, but Camp Charlotte, being larger, would have had a few more men for the picket duty.

Camp Charlotte was a cavalry camp on the old Butterfield Road before reaching the Head Of The Concho Station. Their mission was to escort travelers on the road, whether it was cattle drives heading to Horsehead Crossing or stagecoaches and wagon trains heading to the Ficklin Ferry Crossing. Both Camp Charlotte and Middle Station were enclosed in circular berms.

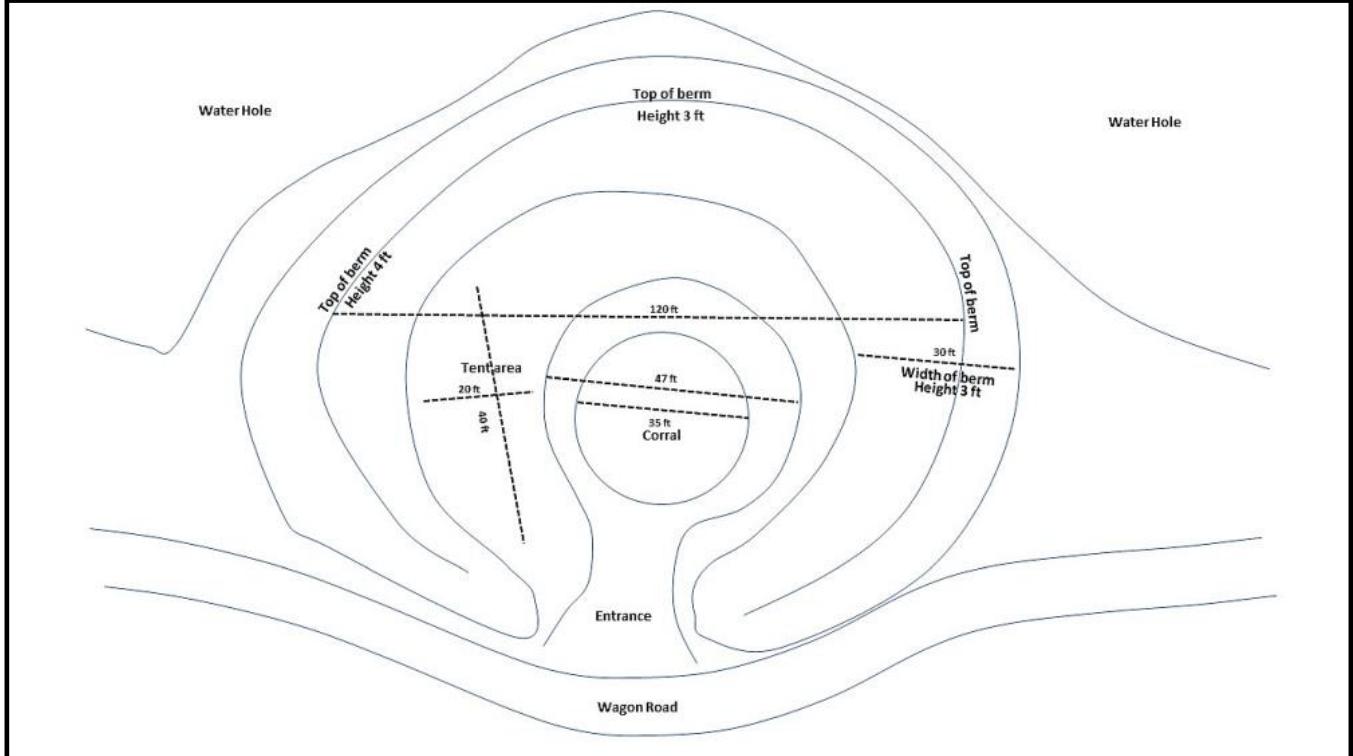
Middle Station Layout

The similarities between Camp Charlotte and Middle Station are striking. Both camps were reconstructed with circular berms surrounding them. This was likely due to the lack of other resources in the area and the need to protect a large compound. Camp Charlotte's berm is 150 feet in diameter, and Middle Station is 120 feet in diameter at its widest point. The Middle Station berm averages three to four feet high, and the Camp Charlotte berm averages three to five feet high. Both have the portion of the berm facing the road open and level ground.



Comparison of The Two Camps

The difference between the two is that Camp Charlotte was a cavalry company and required a large corral, which they built behind the berm with a rock wall. Middle Station appears to have kept its small corral in the middle of the berm area. The tents were probably set in a widened space to the north side of the corral, or on the left side if viewed from the open entrance.



Middle Station

With this understanding, we can now create a probable layout, using AI graphics.

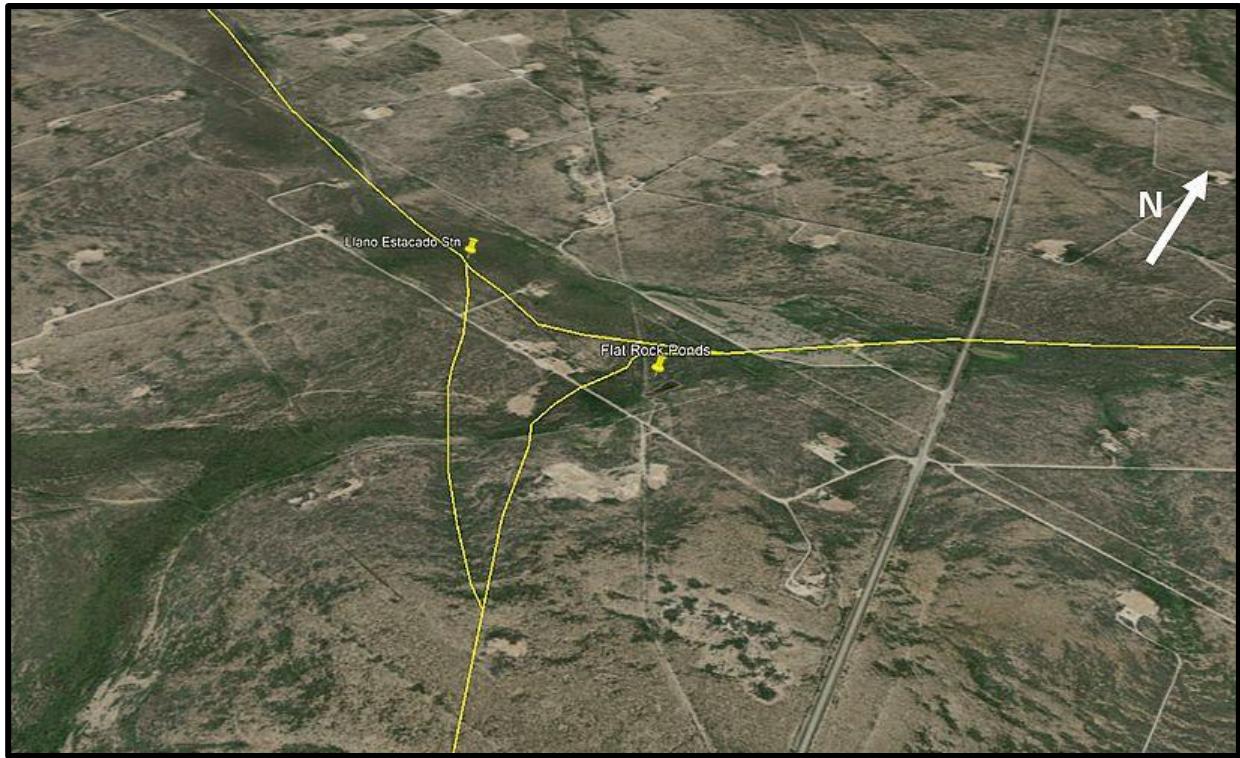


AI depiction of Middle Station

The Ending For Middle Station

In 1878, Colonel Benjamin Grierson, Commander of Fort Concho, ordered his men to scout for a water source that might be used by “depredating Indians” in the dry country west of the Head of the Concho, Middle Concho River. Two cowboys who had been chasing cattle thieves led a scouting detachment to the spring. With the report sent back to Fort Concho, Colonel Grierson took to the field to see for himself and quickly decided that this would be an excellent location for a small military camp, not only to keep Indians from using this water source, but also to serve as a shortcut to the Pecos Mail Station. (Ashmore, 2023) Construction of the camp began in November 1878. (Riemenschneider)

This change required Ben Ficklin’s mail line to also change its route to provide mail and official communications to the camp. Thus, in November 1878, Middle Station was abandoned, and Camp Grierson’s Spring became the intermediate stop on the way to Pecos Mail Station. The military created a new road to both the camp and the Pecos Mail Station. The new road was also used by wagon trains from that point on. For the stagecoaches, from that point on the route would turn south at Centralia Station. We know the mail company used the Centralia Station both before and after the period of the Middle Station route to the Pecos, because there is a visible cutoff road from that station back to the road heading to Camp Grierson’s Spring for the period after 1878, which is easily visible in Google Earth imagery. Additionally, the 1880 census attached to Grierson’s Spring lists two “stage drivers.” (Riemenschneider)

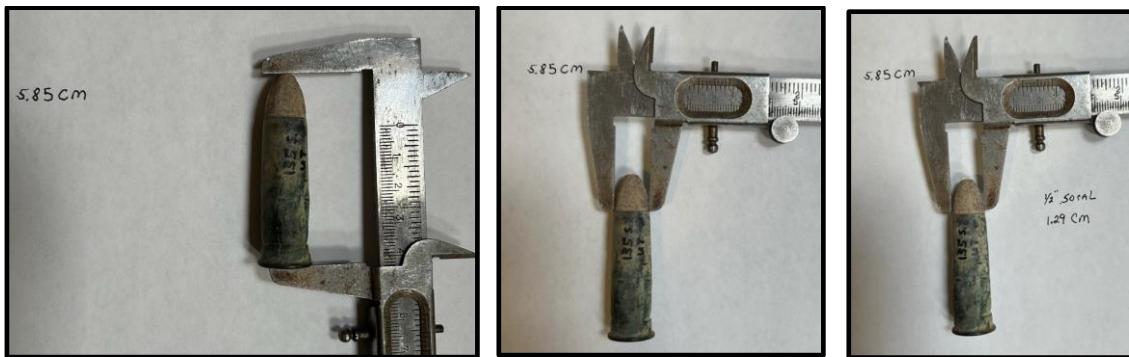


Cutoff road from Centralia Station down to Camp Grierson's Spring

Archeological Findings

Unfortunately, due to the landowner's restrictions, we have only one artifact to help with site validation, but it is a very important one.

In 2013, a member, then working in oil field operations in that area, passed through the abandoned ranch and the pond area. He noticed an unspent cartridge on the ground to the north side of the berm. The cartridge is a .50-70 Government cartridge, the same type used by Fort Concho infantry during the early 1868 to 1873 period of the fort. This is likely a dropped cartridge from a picket post guard on duty. The .50-70 cartridges were carried in a belt-mounted ammo box and could easily be dropped during handling. The converted breech-loading "Trapdoor Springfield Model 1866 rifle, which fired the .50-70, was the standard infantry rifle during that period. These same cartridges were also found at the infantry camp guarding the Concho Mail Station for the San Antonio To El Paso Line. Although the mail route began in March 1868, the Concho Mail Station and its picket camp were established in early 1869. (Ashmore) The Army began transitioning to the Springfield 1873 Trapdoor Rifle, with the .45-70 as its primary rifle cartridge, in the latter part of 1873.



,50-70 cartridge found outside berm of Middle Station



Unfired and unstamped ,50-70 found near the picket station berm

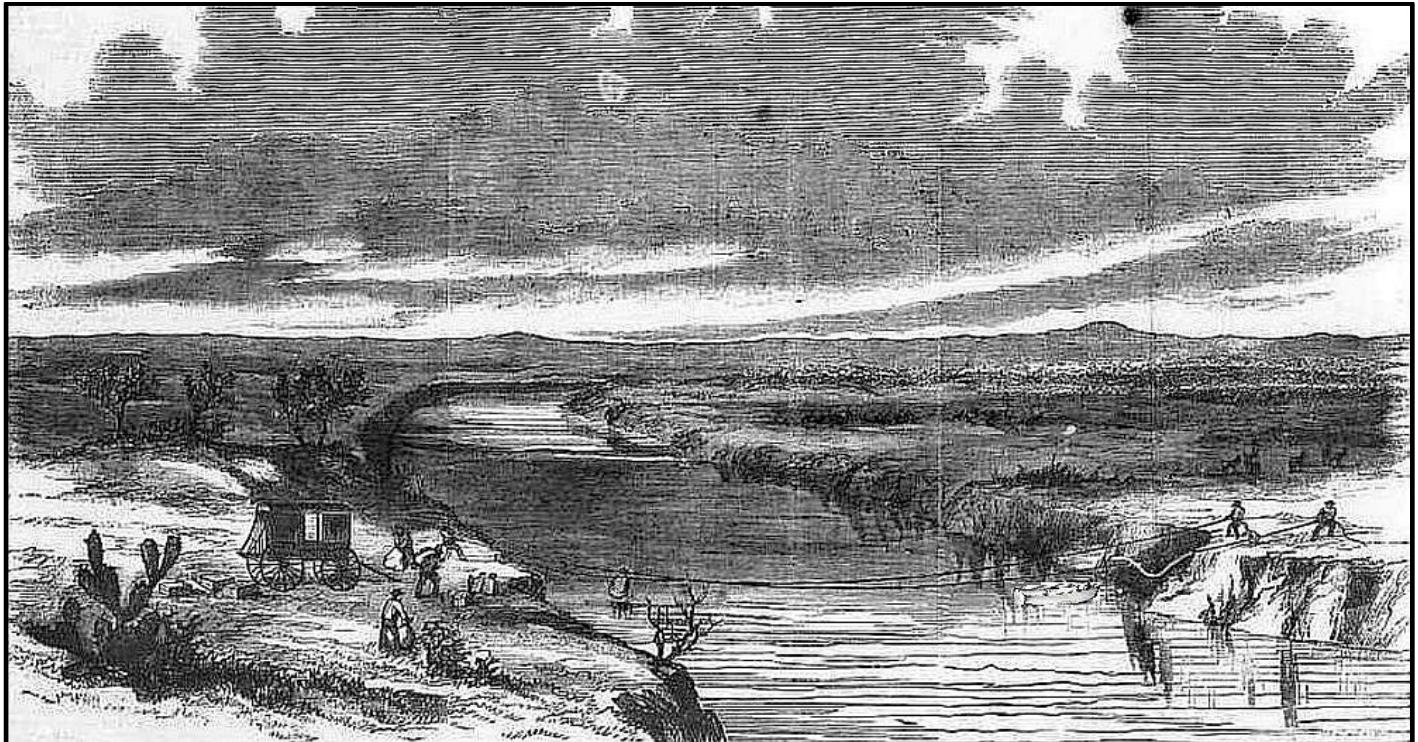


Example: Hagner-type ammo box for .50-70

Conclusion for Middle Station

This resolves several issues that have long confused historians. First, it clarifies the lost station required due to the distance between Centralia Station at Flat Rock Ponds and the Pecos River, whether at the Ficklin Ferry Crossing point or the later Pecos Mail Station. It resolves the confusion of the renaming of the Butterfield period's Llano Estacado Station and the post-Civil War Centralia Station. It resolves the confusion over the naming of Centralia Station and Middle Station found in various civilian and military documents of the time. And finally, it completes the routing of the San Antonio to El Paso stage line between Head of the Concho Station, on the Concho River, and the Pecos Mail Station on the Pecos River.

Ficklin Ferry Crossing and Old Camp Melvin (Melbourne)



1858 newspaper drawing of ferrying packages across the river

History

As Indian attacks at Horsehead Crossing Station continued to increase in 1868, the new Upper Road San Antonio to El Paso Overland Mail owner and the commander at Fort Stockton decided to move from this hotspot downriver to a location farther away from the Apache and Comanche raiding parties. The military and the stagecoach line chose this new location, easily reachable by stagecoaches heading south to the river from Centralia Draw. This was an interim solution while they laid out a plan for a more permanent crossing and mail station downstream, which would eventually include a bridge across the river. This interim crossing was named Ficklin Ferry Crossing after the company's founder, Benjamin Ficklin. This report follows up on research by historians Patrick Dearen, Wayne Austerman, Bill Yeates, and Grover Ramsey, whose works touched on this site but did not address it in its entirety.

The documentation of the Ficklin Ferry Crossing and the supporting military camp comes primarily from U.S. Army records, specifically reports from Fort Stockton. In April 1868, Fort Stockton's Commander, Colonel Edward Hatch, ordered the 9th Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers to scout a new site for a mail and passenger river crossing downriver from Horsehead Crossing. Sometime in June 1868, Benjamin Ficklin's men and 9th Cavalry scouts secured the area for a new crossing and named it Ficklin Ferry Crossing. (Austerman) They

used the same methodology for crossing the river at this location as at Horsehead Crossing. A small skiff boat was used to ferry passengers and mail across while stagecoaches waited on each side of the river. The site was chosen for two main reasons. First, the gap between the hills allowed access to the river, and second, they found a clean running spring on the hillside above the area. Clean springs were a critical factor in these occupation sites, whether it was Indian, settlers, military, or mail lines.

Colonel Hatch issued Special Order 56 on July 1st, 1868, ordering that the mail crossing point be moved from Horsehead Crossing to a new location downriver. The Horsehead Crossing Station, previously built and used by the Butterfield Overland Mail Line before the Civil War, was being reused at the time by the San Antonio to El Paso Mail Line beginning in March 1868, and Colonel Hatch had detached a small unit to protect it. However, they could not stop the Indian depredations at the station or adequately protect the passengers.

Although the orders came from Colonel Hatch, Ben Ficklin had ongoing direct communication with Brigadier General J. J. Reynolds, 5th District Commander, Texas, regarding his problems at the many swing stations across West Texas. General Reynolds promised to assist in protecting the stations, which led to subsequent orders and to military detachments being sent to each swing station throughout West Texas. (Barton) Thus, the orders to find and relocate to a safer location on the Pecos River likely originated with the 5th District Headquarters in San Antonio and were passed down to Fort Stockton.

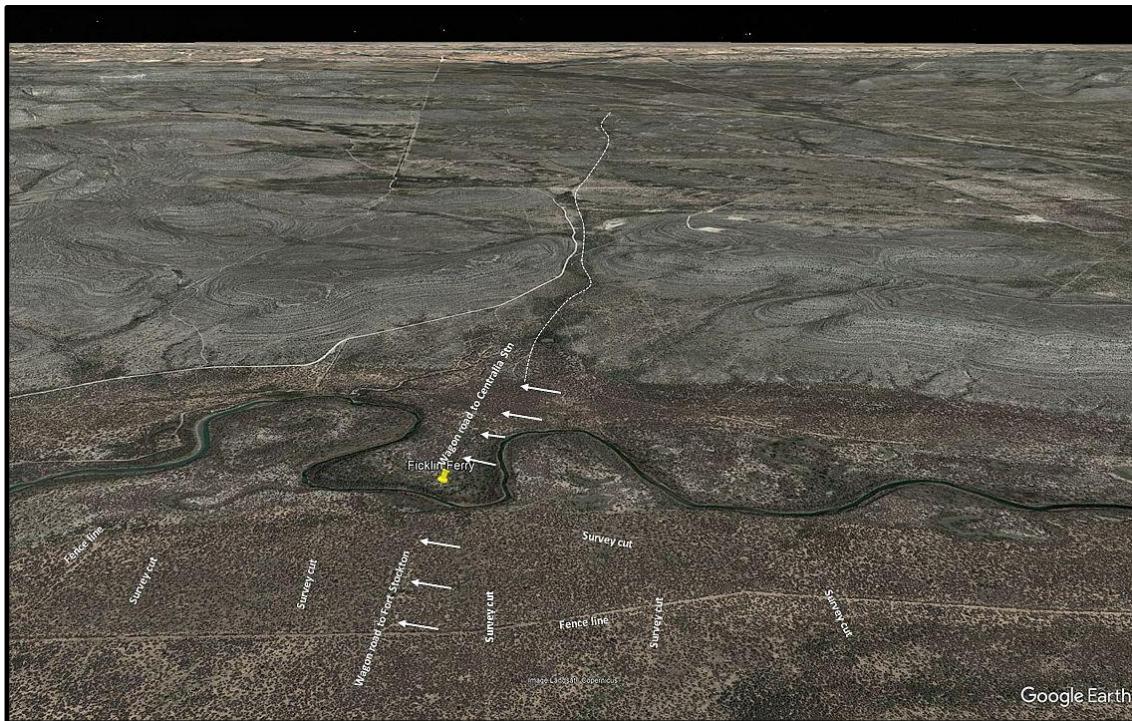
In July 1868, a detachment of Company A, 41st Infantry Regiment Buffalo Soldiers, led by 1st Lieutenant Robert Neely, departed Fort Stockton and made its way to the new Ficklin Ferry Crossing point to set up camp and picket post guard operations. On July 17th, the detachment from Company G, 41st Infantry Regiment, departed Horsehead Crossing Station and returned to post, indicating that the station was abandoned at that time. Thus, the new Pecos River Ficklin Ferry Crossing was operational around the end of July 1868. Military orders indicate that the infantry detachment was also working on the river embankments into August.

As stated in our Pecos Mail Station report, this site remained active until the end of October or early November 1869, when the entire operation moved one mile downstream to the new Pecos Mail Station, new Camp Melvin, and Pecos River Pontoon Bridge. Thus, Ficklin Ferry Crossing was active for about 14 months. This was due to the massive undertaking of building a large stone corral, a stone station, and a pontoon bridge across the river at the new station. (Ashmore, 2023)

The Ficklin Ferry Crossing Location

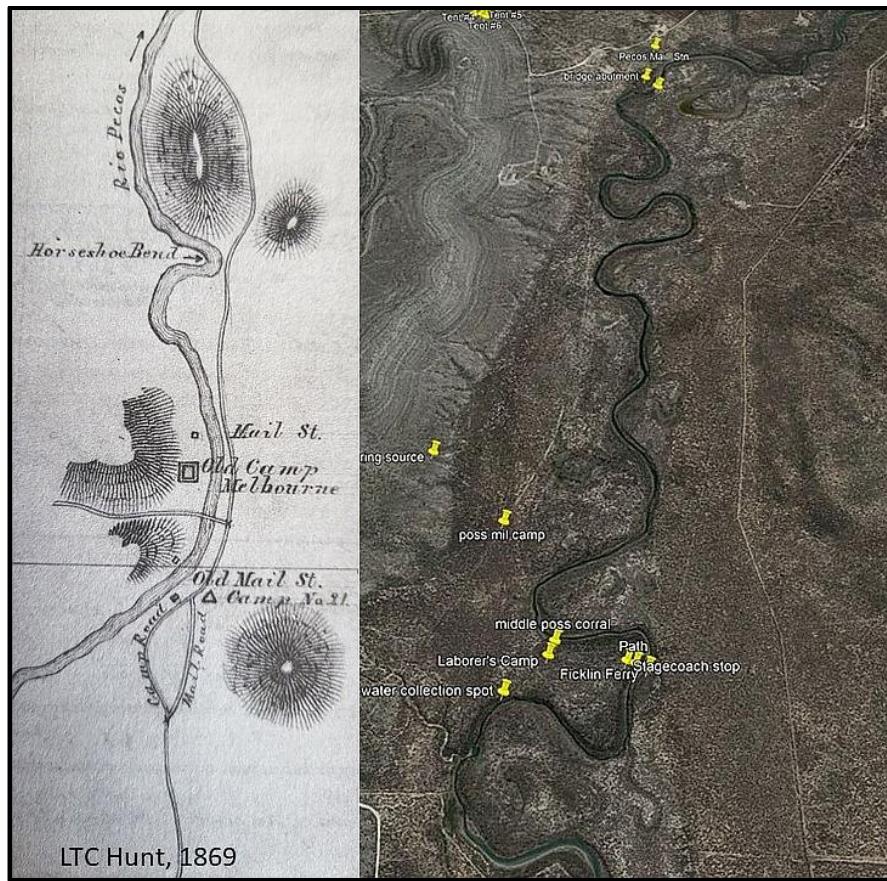
The older pre-Civil War Lower Road went from Fort Clark through Fort Lancaster, then up the west side of the Pecos River and on to Fort Stockton. It was never reused for mail runs after the Giddings Pecos Station (the next station after Fort Lancaster) was attacked and burned down by Indians during the Civil War in 1862. The road continued to see activity from wagon trains, freighters, and the military, but never for mail. That road ran almost a mile from the river, bypassing the old burned-out station on its way to a camping area near a spring called 'Leaving The Pecos.'

The new mail road, called the Upper Road, can still be followed from the Ficklin Ferry river crossing north through the gap in the hills to eventually reach Centralia (Central) Station. On the west side, the mail road can be seen departing from the exact opposite bank of the east-side road, connecting to the old Lower Road, then heading to Escondido Springs Station, now known as Tunas Station, 19 miles from Fort Stockton. Multiple survey cuts are visible in satellite imagery from a much later period, when the area was being laid out into sections.

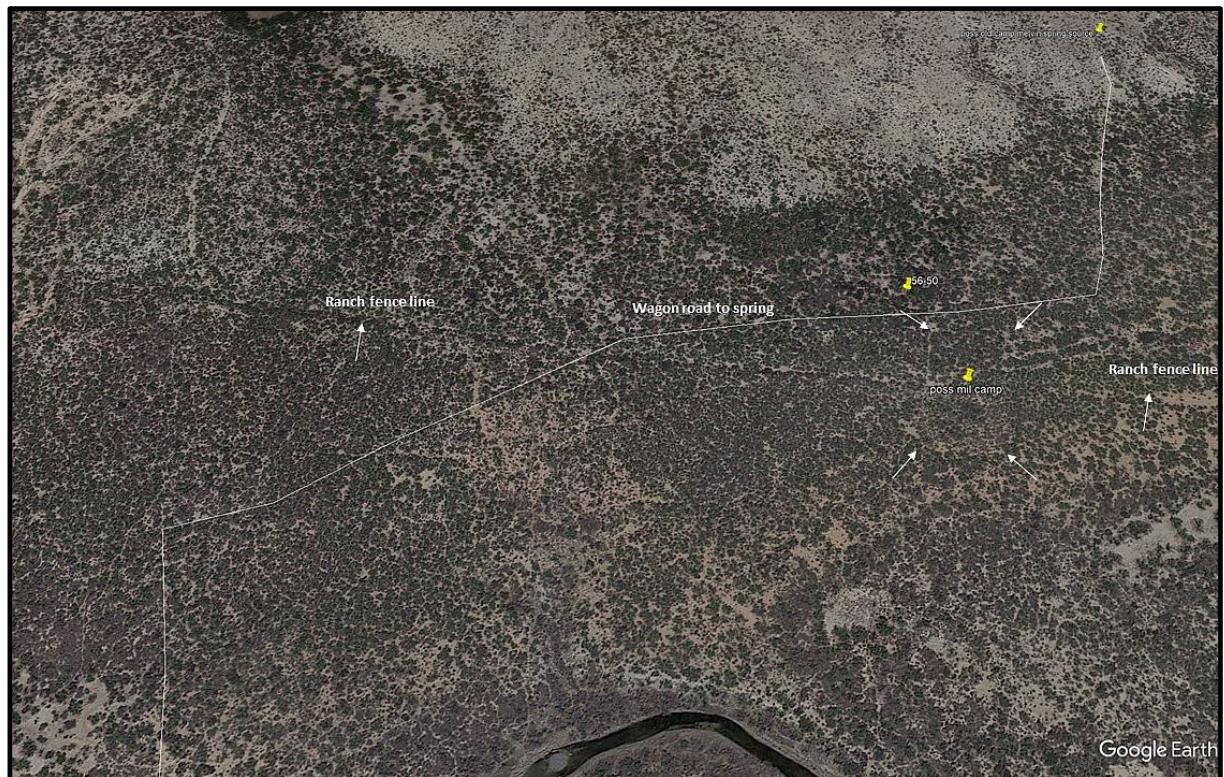


Ficklin Ferry Crossing location and wagon trace

The location of the crossing, the former military camp, and the stagecoach road match a map produced by Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Hunt, who passed through the area in November 1869, while serving at Fort Stockton. His map indicates it was abandoned, and he gave the name as Melbourne rather than Melvin. Neither of these names can be found in military records.



Comparison of crossing and military camp



Probable former military camp boundary identified in LTC Hunt's map, and wagon road to spring

During an archaeological reconnaissance of the area in April 2024, we found that, due to excessive flooding over the last 156 years, most artifacts commonly found at these camps had been either swept downstream by the massive floods or buried so deeply they could not be detected. This is a common issue at historical sites near the Pecos River. We could only find a single but important substantiating artifact in the area of the military map on LTC Hunt's map. It was a spent 56-50 cartridge found eight inches deep in the excessive sandy flood overburden.

The 56-50 was a cartridge for the Spencer carbine, in use by the Overland Mail Company in 1868. It was issued to all employees. (Barton) One cartridge was found close to what was a wagon road leading up to a local spring on the side of the hill.

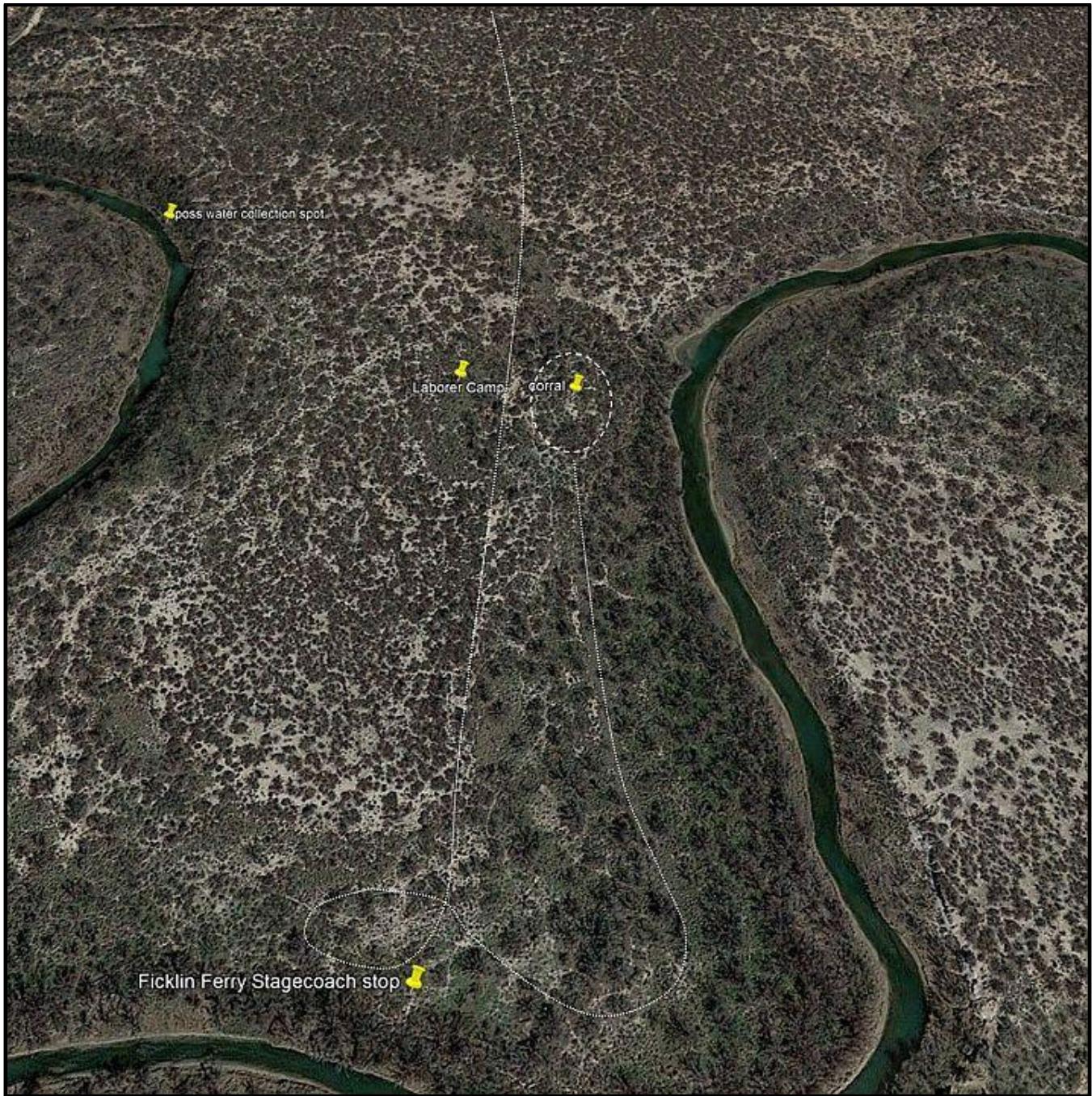


56-50 cartridge found near road to spring

The laborer camp and corral can be seen in overhead imagery and in the unnatural vegetative aftergrowth alongside the former stagecoach road. They sit 200 yards back from the river crossing point, side by side, with the road running between them. There is also a separate road leading back to the corral for the changing of the mule team. A sweep of this area, unfortunately, again produced negative results for artifacts. Again, we believe the floods were too severe and left everything either too deeply covered or completely swept away. Mesquite overgrowth is also now a significant problem in this area.



Deep, sandy flood overburden in the area near the river



Stagecoach road, turn-around area, laborer camp, and corral

Google Earth imagery reveals the old turnaround traces for the coaches on each side of the river. This also gives us insight into the actual crossing point, where the river is around 50 feet across. This location, between river bends, is very similar to the ferry crossing location at Horsehead Crossing Station. (Ashmore, 2019)



Turn-arounds and crossing point for Ficklin Ferry Crossing

Conclusion for Ficklin Ferry Crossing

The Ficklin Ferry Crossing is another piece of history in the westward expansion after the Civil War. Although it was a temporary site, it lasted for 14 months. This temporary, but lengthy period was probably unexpected due to the massive construction required a mile downstream for the stone Pecos Mail Station, its extensive stone corral, and the delays encountered while bridging the river. During this time, even wagon trains used the Ferry Crossing location, as journaled by Harriet Bunyan in May 1869, writing that they gained permission to ferry belongings across in the mail skiff. (Dearen)

Pecos Mail Station (41CX1825/1826) & Camp Melvin (41CX20): The Rest Of The Story



The Pecos Mail Station and Camp Melvin were constructed for the San Antonio-To-El Paso Mail Line (also known as the Ben Ficklin Mail Line). These three sites, which encompass the entire operation, have been known to locals in the Iraan, Texas, area since the town was founded in the late 1920s. Generations of families have been climbing the rock-walled station, the nearby corral, and the military camp to look for interesting trash that might have been left behind for as long as they can remember. The nearby and long-gone pontoon bridge is a legend in the archives of Trans-Pecos history. Historians have written stories based on the few military records and the personal narratives of ranching families and their cattle and wagon crossings of the muddy, winding, and dangerous Pecos River.

So, why would we begin another archeological study of what everyone has known about and mostly forgotten and written off as an old memory? The answer is that the complete and complex story was never actually told. Everyone just assumed it was just there one day, lasted a little over 12 years, and was gone.

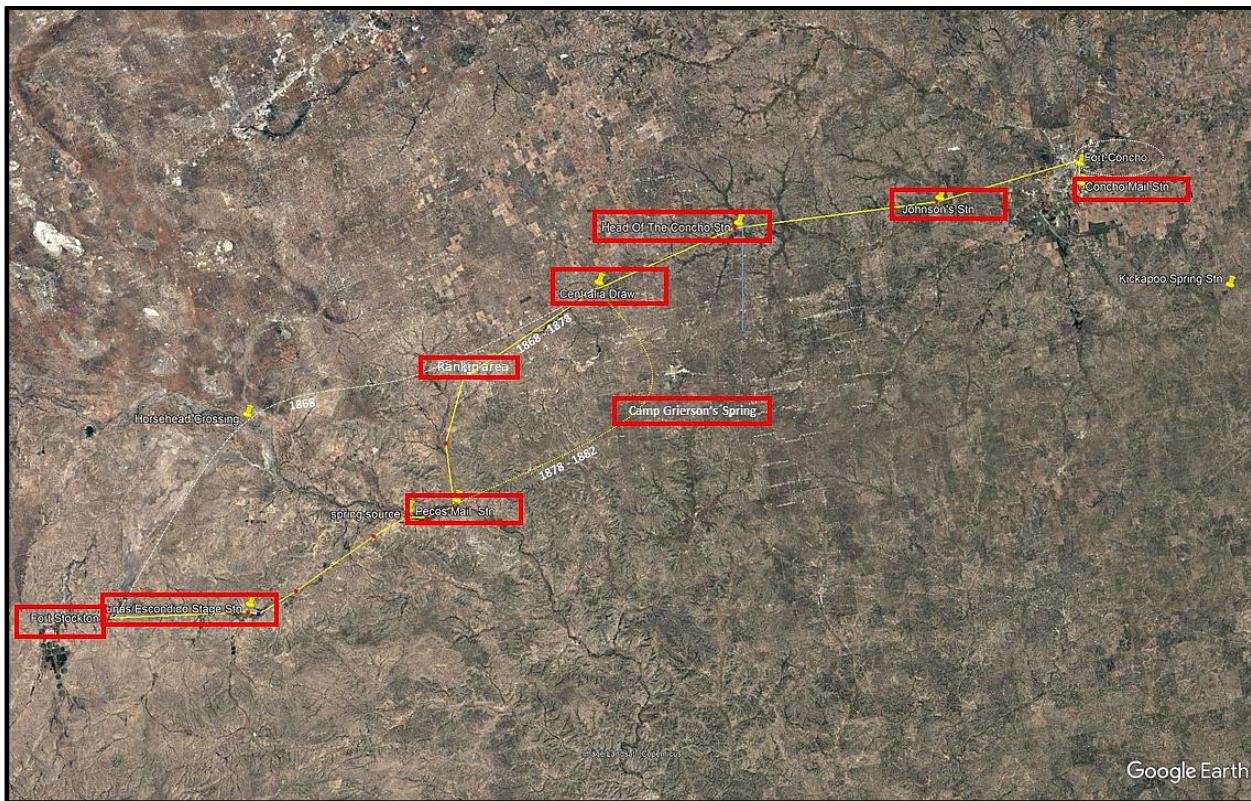
But the story goes much deeper. With new archeological and research techniques, we can now tell the whole story – the human story- from beginning to end.

History

Most of the Pecos Mail Station period documentation comes from the U.S. Army records, specifically the reports from Fort Stockton. In April of 1868, Fort Stockton's Commander, Colonel Edward Hatch, ordered the 9th Cavalry to scout out a new site for a mail coach river crossing downriver from Horsehead Crossing due to the Indian problems that were not abating for that crossing. Benjamin Ficklin's men had been using the old Butterfield Overland Mail's station to cross the river and head to Fort Stockton for the San Antonio to El Paso Mail Line. The Horsehead Crossing Station, previously built and used by the Butterfield Overland Mail Line before the Civil War, was being reused beginning in March 1868. (Ashmore) Colonel Hatch had detached a small unit to protect it. However, they were unable to stop the Indian depredations at the station or properly protect the passengers. By June, they had found a location for a new crossing and named it Ficklin Ferry Crossing. (Austerman) Benjamin Ficklin set up the same technique for crossing the river at this new location as they had at Horsehead Crossing. A small skiff boat was used to ferry passengers and mail across the river while stagecoaches waited on each side of the river.

Although the orders came from Colonel Hatch, Ben Ficklin had ongoing direct communication with Brigadier General J. J. Reynolds, 5th District Commander, Texas, regarding his problems at the many stations across West Texas. General Reynolds promised to assist in protecting the stations, which led to the subsequent orders and military detachments sent to each station throughout West Texas. These were all guarded by the now-famous Buffalo Soldiers. (Barton) Thus, the orders to find and relocate to a safer location on the Pecos River likely originated from the 5th District Headquarters in San Antonio and were sent to Fort Stockton.

Colonel Hatch issued Special Order 56 on July 1st, 1868, ordering that the mail crossing point be moved from Horsehead Crossing to a new location downriver. On July 12th 1868, a detachment of Company A, 41st Infantry Regiment, led by 1st Lieutenant Robert Wesly, departed Fort Stockton and made its way to the new Ficklin Ferry Crossing point to assist in constructing the new crossing and their own camp and picket post guard operations. On July 17th, the detachment from Company G, 41st Infantry Regiment, departed Horsehead Crossing Station and returned to Fort Stockton, indicating that the station was then abandoned. Thus, the new Pecos River Ficklin Ferry Crossing was operational in mid to late July 1868.



Route(s) From Fort Concho to Fort Stockton

Colonel Hatch was given a large budget by the 5th District Headquarters in Texas to rebuild Fort Stockton, beginning with its re-occupation in July 1867. Construction began in September of 1867, with four stone masons, 12 teamsters, and four quarrymen. These numbers jumped dramatically in October to 58 masons, 12 teamsters, and 6 quarrymen. This continued throughout the rest of 1867 and well into 1868. The year 1868 began with 33 masons and dropped down to 18 masons and 12 teamsters by May. It appeared by the numbers that the work of rebuilding the fort was beginning to recede. However, in August, the numbers jumped back up to 24 stone masons and 20 teamsters. There is nothing in the records to indicate exactly what these contractors were working on each month, but the numbers jumped consistently from August 1868 through February 1869, when they again began to drop off. In March, they were down to 10 masons and 20 teamsters; from April 1869 on, it dropped to four masons per month, sometimes two.

At the same time, in the report to Congress, dated August 15th, 1868, the Quartermaster, District of Texas, reported,

“At Stockton nothing could be procured toward building but stone, lime, sand, and mud – the post being in the middle of the plains, prairies, and barren mountains, extending hundreds of miles in every direction. It was determined to build at Stockton of adobe with stone foundations.”

So, the question is, ‘If they were building with adobe on stone foundations, why did they continue to need such a large number of stone masons and teamsters well into 1869? We believe the answer lies in the incredible task they undertook to build the Pecos Mail Station, including a stone compound and a stone corral. The station walls measured approximately 10 feet in height, 2 feet wide, and 220 feet in total length. The stone corral wall measured approximately 6 feet high, 2.5 feet wide, and 700 feet in total length, covering over a half acre.

The drop-off in numbers indicates the construction of the two sites was probably completed by April 1869. However, we know the ferry crossing continued to be used through at least June 1869, when Harriet Bunyard, in a wagon train, wrote in her journal about crossing the river by floating the wagons while their possessions were taken across in the ferry skiff. We also know the ferry crossing was still being used four months later, in October, when Major C.M. Tunnel reported still looking for a bridging location near the “ferry site.” (Dearen) But the next month, in November, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Hunt, while on his way to Fort Davis, reported that the “old Camp Melbourne” was abandoned. Given this, we can determine that the military moved its camp to begin defending the new operational site at the end of October or early November 1869. Two months later, in December, the Fort Davis surgeon reported that, during his travels through the area, the pontoon bridge was in place. (Dearen) Given these reports, we can assume the delay between the completion of stonework and the startup of operations at the new site was due to the pontoon bridge being installed.

Construction

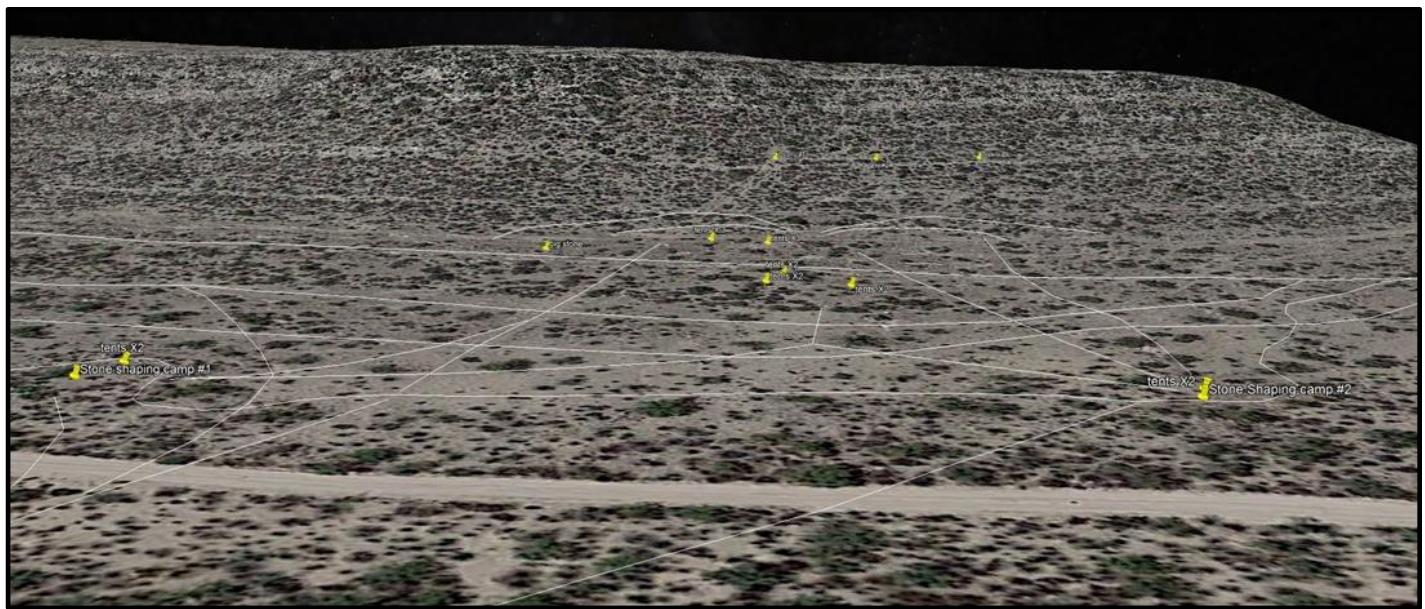
The construction of the two sites – the stone station and stone corral - was a massive operation, conducted by skilled quarrymen, stone masons, and teamsters to transport all the stone. We estimate the station used around 522 tons of stone, and the corral another 770 tons. The amount of stonework and shaping could only have been done by skilled quarrymen and stone masons of the time. The amount of stone required to construct these two sites indicates a massive operation involving many wagons for heavy transport.

There were three quarry sites halfway up the hill at the first large rock shelf. Below them were two sets of loading wagon roads, one high and one low. Below the wagon loading roads, we found five tent platforms. The platforms were leveled so we could measure them and determine approximately how many tents were on each platform. Two platforms measured 12 x 3 yds, one 7 x 3 yds, and two 5 x 3 yds. Each was strewn with period can trash and supply box strapping. We estimated these accommodated 12 tents total, probably all large single-man tents.

From the loading areas, the wagon traces went either to one of two stone-shaping camps or straight out to one of the construction sites. Each stone-shaping camp had tent platforms that would have accommodated two tents. Broken rubble was strewn below the shaping site tent areas and the same period cans and trash could be found. In stone shaping camp #2 (east side) several unfinished or unused stone blocks were also left behind.



Trash Found Around Tent Site Pads



Quarry Sites (above), Wagon Roads, Tent Sites Below, Stone Shaping Sites #1 & #2 at bottom



Quarry Site #1: Untouched Area on Left, Quarried Area on Right



Stone Shaping Camp #2 (mound partially covered)



Left behind shaped stones



Tent Platform below Quarry Sites

At one of the stone-shaping sites, we found a mule shoe and a nail that are the size of those used by small Spanish mules. These are the mules that were used by the stage line from the Concho Mail Station, near Fort Concho, on their westward route. This is a good indication that the mules used by the construction workers were from the stage line, and it supports the conclusion that the stage line and the U.S. Army (with their contracted workers) were collaborating on the construction of this station and corral.



Spanish-Sized Mule Shoe and Nail Found At Stone Shaping Site

Far to the east of the operational area, there is a site with large quarried stones lining it, which we designated Tent Site #1. It is in line but separated from the other tent sites by 125 feet. The other tent sites are laid out 35 feet apart and dug out to be level, but not rock-lined. This was probably the operations supervisor's tent

site. Any operation of this magnitude would have required an overall supervisor, and he would have been assigned a site tailored to his position. Additionally, we can trace a perimeter wagon road going to this site specifically. This wagon road can be traced to the far western side of the operations area.

Although this and the other tent sites are strewn with the normal metal trash found at all camps, one significant artifact was discovered next to this particular site. It is the internal back-plate cover over the gears of a pocket watch. This, along with the location and the quarried stone lining, helps to identify this particular tent site as a probable supervisor's site. After the construction phase was completed, this site was likely taken over by the NCO in charge of the military detachment.



Perimeter wagon road trace



Probable Operation Supervisor's Tent Site



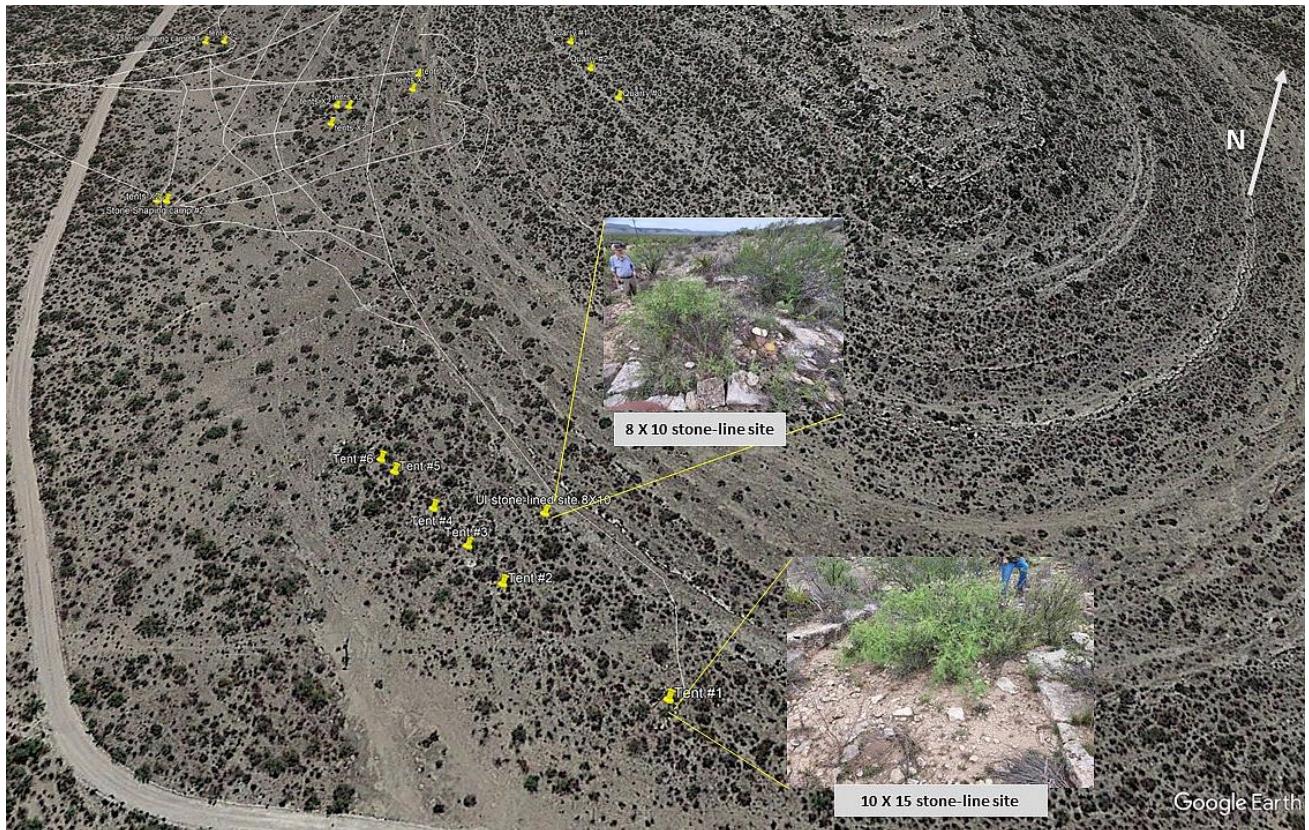
Pocket Watch Back Plate Cover





Examples of Back Plate Covers On Pocket Watches

There are five more tent sites in this area. All are the same size as site #1 (10 X 15), but not stone-lined. They are all dug out and leveled to serve as tent sites. An out-of-place 8X 10 stone-lined site sits above the other tent sites. It is speculation, but this may well have been a central latrine site, possibly tent-covered and stone-lined to reinforce the walls against cave-in. The site is north of the tent sites, where a predominant south wind prevails. Based on proximity to a supervisor's site, we assess that the five adjacent sites were probably the primary stone mason's tent sites, as they would have been the most important and highest-paid workers in this operation.



Probable Supervisor, Five More Tent Sites and Possible Latrine Site Above

If you count up the tent sites we believe are related to stonework (quarry, shaping, construction) we come up with 21 personnel. That is very close to the military reports, which ranged from 20 to 24 from August 1869 to January 1870, before beginning to drop off for the next two months of 1869 (18 & 10, respectively), and then dropping completely to four in April.

The second part of the operation was the teamsters, who needed to transport all the quarried rock to the construction sites. There were 16 – 20 teamsters, depending on the month, contracted by Fort Stockton from August 1868 to March 1869. It appears the teamsters set up their camp and wagon parking area on the lower west side of the quarry hill operations area. The parking area is well-worn compared to other areas and connects to all the road structures throughout the operational area. Just above the parking area, we found typical period trash, similar to the other camp areas. The parking area appears to be 200 X 65 feet and could easily contain 12 wagons pulled by 4-mule teams.



Assessed Wagon Parking Area and Teamster Camp Site (actual dimensions of heavy wagons)

After the wagons departed the quarry area, the roads headed south to the Pecos Mail Station construction site, with a turn-off over to the corral construction site.



Roads from Quarry Area to Two Construction Sites

The corral itself covered over half an acre, and the walls were originally about six feet high. We know this from an early 1900s photograph taken before the walls had completely collapsed. Greasewood stands approximately four feet high at full growth. With this, we can make a good estimate from the photograph that the wall is six feet high. This corral was huge, covering 0.60 acres, or 26,136 square feet. We can only speculate why such a large corral was built, with the best guess being that, due to the Indian threat, they never wanted the animals to be outside of the corral other than relieving stagecoach teams at the station.



Photograph of Corral from the Early 1900s

The walls were built 2.5 feet wide. Two lines of faced rock were laid, with a gap in the middle to be filled in with rubble. In this way, the shaping masons only had to make a flat face on one side of the large stones. This saved quite a bit of work and made a stronger wall



for such a long, straight line.



Corral Stone Wall

Unfortunately, in the 1990s, an electrical power line right-of-way was created that ran past the northeast corner of the corral. The corral had not been designated a historic site, and the electrical company bulldozed the corner beneath the right-of-way. This shows the importance of designating historic sites with the Texas Historical Commission to properly document and preserve them against encroaching modernization, while considering alternatives. This site is now separately designated in the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory database, the University of Texas, and the Texas Historical Commission as 41CX1826.



Stone Corral .60 Acre



Northeast Corner of Corral's Bulldozed Area and Power Lines Above

The Pecos Mail Station was the entire reason for all of this construction. Although it was given the name of 'mail station,' it was essentially a stagecoach swing station for coaches going to or coming from El Paso and having to cross the river. More immediately, it was on the way or coming from Fort Stockton.

All the stone was considered a requirement due to the Indian problems of the time. Attacking stations, mostly to steal the animals, was a constant problem and a real danger in this open country. Having to stop to

change mule teams or to corral them for rest required serious protection. Indians were experts at overcoming just about any method devised. Very high rock walls with very heavy gates and military guards were the only way they had come up with that seemed to deter them - and even that oftentimes did not work.



Pecos Mail Station Ruins. (Note C.A. Maedgen standing near the collapsed wall on the left side)

The station consisted of 10-foot-high walls (see photo at the beginning of the report) with a 45 X 45-foot courtyard that stagecoaches could drive into for their mule-team changeover. The entrance appears to have been a gated 10-foot-wide opening. The north side of the station is taken up by two rooms and a storeroom/tack shed. The two rooms probably shared a central fireplace, open to each room. The common area appears to be 15 X 25 feet and has a rear door leading out to a small, stone-lined platform that was their outhouse. The second room was probably sleeping quarters and measured 15 X 15 feet. The storeroom was set back from an alcove and measured approximately 5 X 10 feet.

On the south side of the compound, a small stone structure was built with no entrance to the main compound. The door into it was on the west side. It measures 12 x 12 feet. Based on a wagon road leading to this small

structure from the military area, we can assess that this was a guard post, and probably the documented guard house used for detaining any soldiers put up on charges. Since they would need to see to the northeast, we can determine it was probably at least as high as the main walls. The location also gave them a good view of the pontoon bridge crossing, 170 yards upriver to the west.

The Pecos Station walls used a similar construction technique to the corral, but they were 2 feet wide rather than 2.5 feet. They were laid out in a double line of stone. In some cases, fully squared blocks were used, especially at the base of the wall, while in others, only one face of the stone was shaped. Small pieces were placed to level each row of stone and fill in gaps.



Double-Line Stone Wall



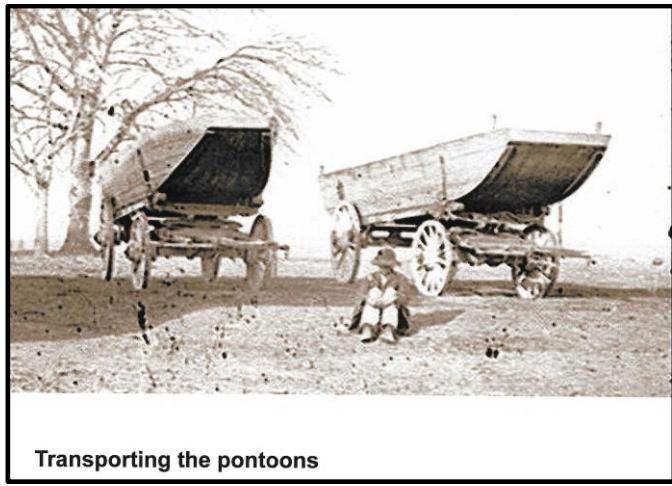
Fully Cut Blocks on Base of Wall

Pecos Mail Station's Pontoon Crossing Bridge

It appears from the records that there was a seven-month gap (April – end of October 1869) between the completion of stone construction and the move from the Ficklin Ferry Crossing to the new site. This was likely due to the Army's delay in specifying how to build a bridge across the river. This was a critical element of the new site. It would allow for stagecoaches and other standard-sized wagons to cross the river. It is likely that once the stone construction ended, the efforts began to prepare for bridging construction. This bridging would have required a military engineering company, likely based in San Antonio. It was these military engineering companies that had the means and skills to build these bridges. Their expertise came from their bridging operations during the Civil War. According to a 1882 military communication between Fort Concho and the commanding officer at the Grierson Springs detachment, the bridge was jointly owned by the government and the Ben Ficklin Mail Line. (Dearen) The gathering of equipment and transportation for such a large bridging operation, and then the building itself, would account for the extended period of time for completion.



A Civil War pontoon bridge



Transporting the pontoons

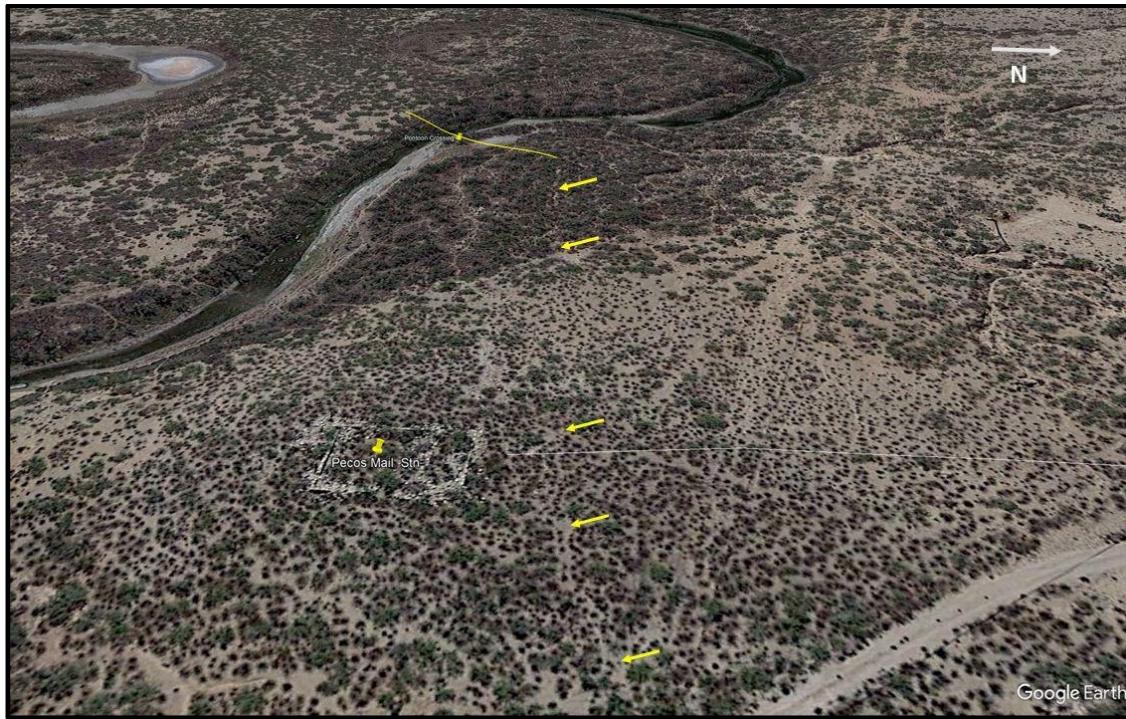
Another factor in the delay was likely the Army's first attempt to move a single-span wooden bridge from Lancaster Crossing to this location, which began in December 1868. (Dearen) The records don't show how long this took, but it couldn't have been an easy task: taking an entire wooden bridge apart and transporting it by wagon 32 miles upriver, only to find it was too short and another way had to be found. The remains of the abutment for the failed wooden bridge attempt remain below the stone mail station.



Earthen ramp and retaining wall

This is the abutment for the bridge (prior to pontoon bridge) that was never built (photo 2002, courtesy Bill Yeates)

The pontoon floating bridge was the second choice that could handle wagons in that period. It is a much larger operation than most people can conceive today. And given that the west side embankment is at least 15 feet higher than the north side at water level, the bridge would have been quite long. By following the old wagon trace that runs past the station and down to the bridge area, we could find what would have been the bridge abutment, or east-side entrance. Using Google Earth, we can also find the elevation, and the two points on each side of the river are at the same elevation. However, a dip in the bridge to the expected water line would still require a fairly mild cut-bank climb out on the west side to keep the bridge angle from becoming too steep. This would make the bridge approximately 170 feet long. A photograph of a very similar pontoon bridge from the period provides a good sense of this bridge's size. It also provides a good perspective on the requirements for building a structure of this size, far from the major supplies needed.



Wagon Trace and Probable Pontoon Bridge Site



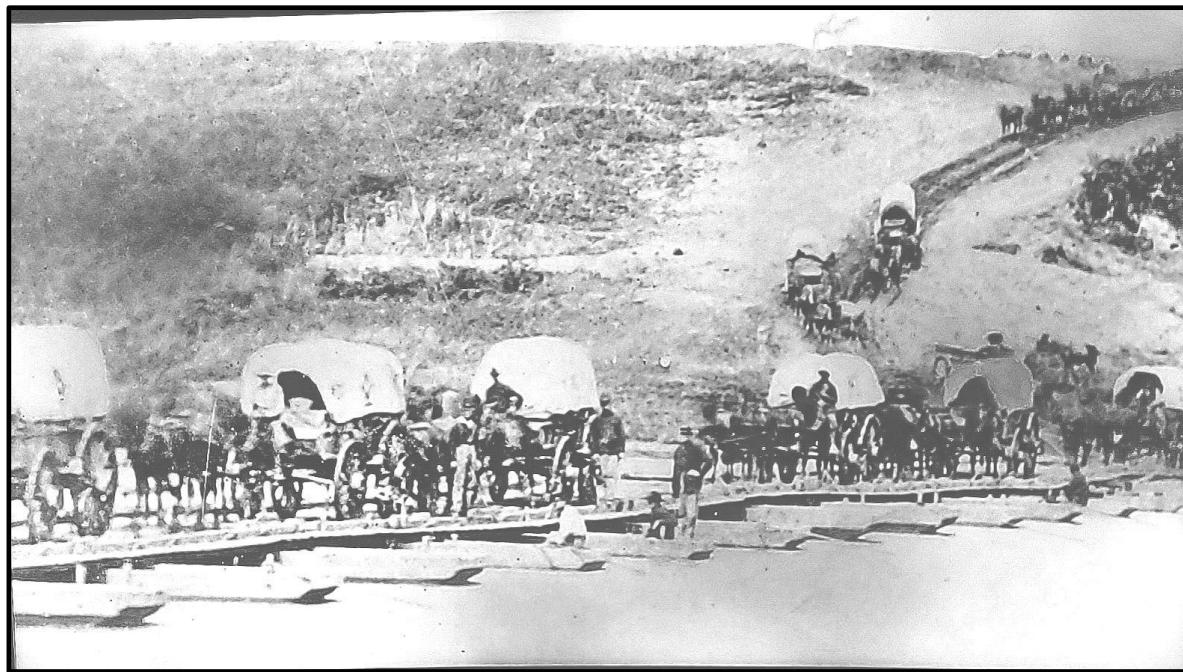
Aerial View from 2003 Where the West Side Road Is Clearly Visible (photo 2003, courtesy Bill Yeates)



East Side Abutment Area, High Water Lines, and Line Of Bridge



Pontoon Bridge Crossing Area with Cut Bank on West Side



Not the Pecos River pontoon bridge, but very similar

We can also assess the purpose of this particular location for the pontoon bridge. This type of bridge requires many pontoons in the water to stabilize it and reduce the angle on each side. This was one of the widest sections of the river at the time, as evidenced by the broad sandbars now exposed. This location would have provided the most water for floating the pontoons.

Camp Melvin

As stated earlier, the military guard detachment likely moved to the new site in late October 1869, marking the probable beginning of operations for the mail station and the pontoon bridge. Before the relocation from the former crossing point, Ficklin Ferry Crossing, the military detachment was reported to have eight soldiers. This likely remained the size of the detachment after the move. However, the numbers changed over the years, depending on the perceived threat.

In May of 1871, the detachment was one NCO and four privates. The following January, the guard detachment was recorded as only four. However, given new attacks throughout the area, from 1876 to 1879, the guards ranged from one to three NCOs and four to nine privates. During the height of the threat, they acted as both station guards and stagecoach escorts (Dearen).

The soldier's routine each day would be to wagon out to the mail station and corral guard posts. This probably happened multiple times per day. This made a solid wagon trace that can be followed through Google Earth imagery. The trace runs from the former tent sites of the stone workers to the mail station guard post, around the mail station, over to the corral gate, around the corral, and back to the starting point.



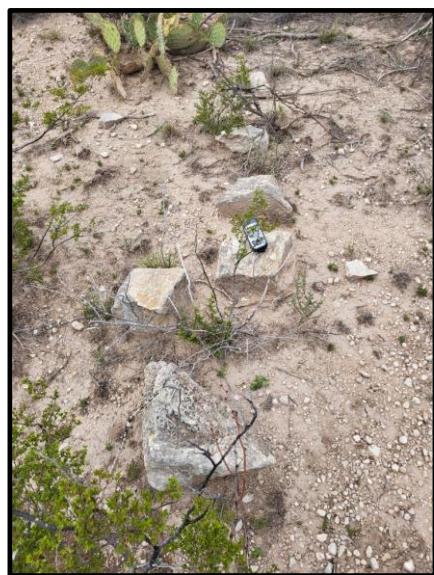
Camp Melvin Military Wagon Trace

In addition to the seven original tent sites, we found one site that was likely for the wagon driver. This small line of rocks marked a 5 x 7-foot tent spot next to what appears to be a wagon parking spot. Nearby, we found a 21-foot line of placed stones that may have marked one end of a small corral for the wagon mules.

A pair of mules is probably all they needed for their daily duties. A ground impression visible on Google Earth indicates a 20 x 25 space was created for the mules.



Tent outline



Lined Rocks



Wagon Trace, Wagon Park Impression, Tent Site, Mule Corral Impression

The Pecos River West Side

There was no mail station on the west side of the Pecos River where the pontoon bridge crossed. However, the Torres family contracted a vegetable farm out of Fort Stockton. They sold vegetables to anyone crossing the river. We conducted an artifact reconnaissance with the following results.



The 56-50 Spencer cartridges were issued to stage drivers and stagehands of the Ficklin Mail Company. The one on the right is headstamped FVV & Co. These were manufactured between 1864 and 1868. It appears to be run over by a wagon. The 45-70 and 50-70 were military cartridges from two different periods, probably from the stagecoaches' escort guards. The 50-70 was the 1869 – 1872 period and the 45-70 was from 1872 – 1882. These were foot stomped, which was an order to all military discarding cartridges. This were to keep Indians from trying to reload and reuse the spent cartridges. The 44 Henry cartridges, although not a standard military cartridge, were also foot stomped. The 38-55 was a civilian cartridge.

Three other items uncovered in the area were a brass rivet from a military belt or knapsack, an end cut from a horseshoe from blacksmithing work, and a bridle rosette.



Conclusion for Pecos Mail Station, Camp Melvin, & Pontoon Bridge

The construction of the Pecos Mail Station and pontoon bridge took 14 months and was completed around December 1869. It was a massive undertaking. It remained operational for 16 years, likely ending when Fort Stockton was abandoned in 1886. The pontoon bridge lasted much longer than that, as wagons from all aspects of commerce continued to use the bridge as long as it held together. Nobody knows exactly when that was, but stories of using the bridge continued into the late 1800s. The stone station was never reused, and its 10-foot walls continued to crumble over the decades; now they are just a few feet high.

The station and bridge were significant in opening up West Texas and beyond until the railroad took over the task. Indian attacks were constantly a threat until around 1879, with reports of deaths by stagecoach drivers, station employees, and those working near the station. That is why the structures were built with such thick stone walls. The military, mostly Buffalo Soldiers, was their only defense, and they were stretched extremely thin, just holding their own and surviving in this harsh environment.

Although the records only hint at the military's funding for this endeavor, the only way it could have been accomplished was through primarily government funds and skilled contract workers. The mail line undoubtedly assisted where it could, but this was a military construction project to ensure the federal mail continued from San Antonio through all the military forts through the Upper Road to El Paso.



1885 photo taken by Capt Weidemeyer, 16th Infantry, Co. F, Fort Concho on a trip from Fort Concho to Fort Stockton by stagecoach. (courtesy Fort Concho archives)

Appendix A

May 21 1871 Camp Melvin Station, Texas. Detachment of Tr. K, 25th U. S. Inf

Sgt. J. Walker in command. Soldiers wounded, 2.

In July 1873 Juan Chabavilla (mule handler) was killed by a raiding party of thirteen Indians that stole the horses and mules of the stage company.

Oct 1877 stage driver killed 16mi north of mail station

Picket nr of soldiers:

June 1869: 8 (source Harriet Bunyard wagon train) Mail skiff = Ficklin Ferry Crossing

May 1871: 5 (1 sgt, 4 pvt)

Jan 1872: 4

Jan 1876 – Oct 1879: 1 – 3 NCO, 4 – 9 pvt

Jan 1880 1 NCO, 2 pvt

Jul 1 1868 Ordered move from Horsehead Crossing

Aug 68 Moved to Ficklin Crossing

Jun 15, 1869 Ferry Crossing still being used. Documented by Harriet Bunyard in Wagon Train.

Oct 1869 Military studying bridge crossing

Old Camp Melvin abandoned (report in Nov 1869, source: Bvt LTC Thomas Hunt)

Pontoon spanned river adjacent to mail station “first few months of 1870”

Mar 1880 military abandon Camp Melvin

By end 1881 all closed

Appendix B Ft Stockton

May 1868 18 stone masons 12 teamsters

Jun 1868 20 stone masons 17 teamsters, Ficklin building Ferry Crossing infrastructure

Jul 1868 16 stone masons 17 teamsters Jul 1 Special order 56 to move

Aug 1868 24 stone masons 20 teamsters (41st Inf moved from HHC)

Sep 1868 23 stone masons 16 teamsters

Oct 1868 21 stone masons 16 teamsters, Lt 41st Inf in charge Pecos Stn

Nov 1868 22 stone masons 20 teamsters

Dec 1868 22 stone masons 21 teamsters, 11 laborers

Jan 1869 22 stone masons 21 teamsters, 11 laborers

Feb 1869 18 stone masons

Mar 1869 10 stone masons

Apr 1869 41st Co A, G 33 detached, **4 stone masons**

May 1869 41st Co A, G 42 detached, 4 stone masons

Jun 1869 41st Co A, G 31 detached, 2 stone masons (still using ferry crossing)

Jul 1869 41st Co A, G 47 detached, 2 stone masons

Aug 1869 41st Co A, G 38 detached, 2 stone masons

Sep 1869: 41st Co A, G 40 detached, 4 stone masons

Oct 1869 41st Co A, G 23 detached, 4 stone masons,

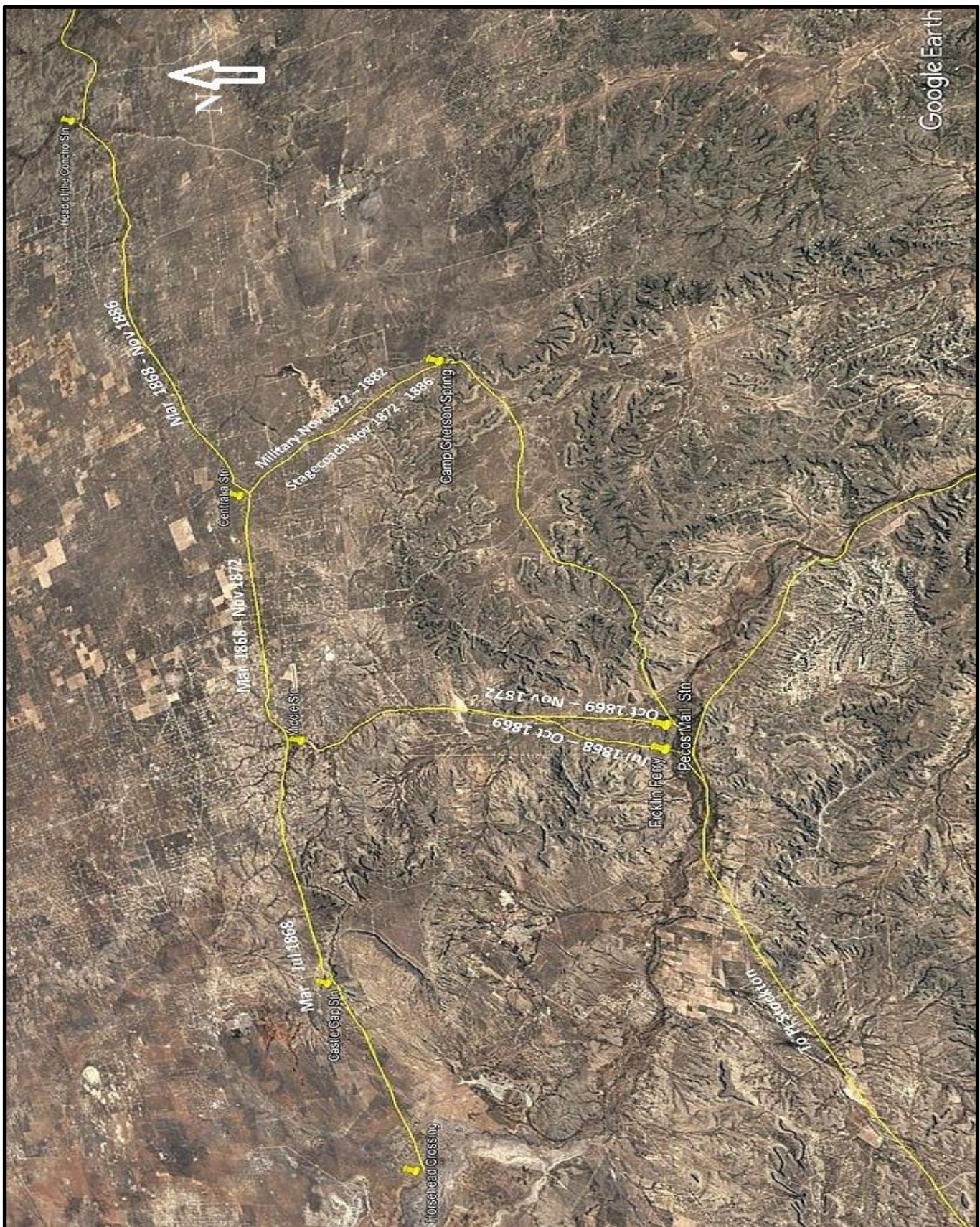
Nov 1869 24th Co G 32 detached, 4 stone masons (Hunt found old Melvin abandoned) Capt Clement 41st Inf in charge of Co. A at Pecos Stn

Dec 1869 24th Co G 31 detached, 4 stone masons, Capt Clement in charge of Co. A at Pecos Stn

Jan 1870 24th Co G 20 detached, 2 stone masons (pontoon bridge), Capt Clement in charge of Co. A at Pecos Stn

Feb 1870 24th Co G 25 detached, 4 stone masons (pontoon bridge), Capt Clement in charge of Co. A at Pecos Stn

Final Map: 1868 – 1886 San Antonio To El Paso Routes and periods from Concho Mail Station to the Pecos River & Fort Stockton (turn sideways to view)



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