

FORT LOWELL  
(Fort Lowell Park)  
2900 North Craycroft Road  
Tucson  
Pima County  
Arizona

HALS AZ-24  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### FORT LOWELL (Fort Lowell Park)

HALS NO. AZ-24

Location: 2900 North Craycroft Road, Tucson, Pima County, Arizona

Fort Lowell Park is in the Fort Lowell Historic District, six miles northeast of downtown Tucson. The site is bordered by North Craycroft Road to the west, East Fort Lowell Road to the north, and East Glenn Street to the south. The eastern border of the park is adjacent to a residential neighborhood.

32.260197, -110.872747 (Google Earth, WGS84)

Significance: Fort Lowell Park has played a critical role in the early and territorial history of Tucson and the state of Arizona. While the Fort Lowell Park site has evidence of prehistoric occupation by the Hohokam and earlier peoples from at least 2000 years ago, it also served as an isolated military post during the late 19th century.

In 1873, Fort Lowell was commissioned six miles northeast of the then-state capital of Tucson as a military encampment to protect the area from the Apache who often raided Tucson and attacked its citizens. The location of Fort Lowell near the confluence of three separate rivers enhanced the defensibility of the Fort and provided a suitable location as the only supply depot near Tucson before the railroad came to the city in 1880. Until its decommissioning in 1891, the Fort's presence contributed to the growth of a small community surrounding it. The Fort and adjacent civilian community included a parade ground, officer's quarters, hospital, stores, and a bakery. Several of the rammed earth and adobe buildings from the period of the fort are still extant and are being rehabilitated by Pima County to serve as an interpretive site for visitors of today's park space.

Description: Fort Lowell Park is in the historic neighborhood of Old Fort Lowell, a microcosm of Southwest history due to the many cultures that are part of its past. The park covers 60 acres and is bordered by N Craycroft Road to the west, E Fort Lowell Road to the north, and E Glenn Street to the south. The eastern border of the park is adjacent to a residential neighborhood. Three phases of expansion or alteration contribute to Fort Lowell Park's footprint, starting with Hohokam settlers and leading to the current recreational use of the park.

Fort Lowell Park provides amenities and recreational services, but also has several memorials and commemorations to remember and pay respect to those who served in the military. These memorials include the Veterans Memorial Plaque, the memorial for the "rugged pioneer soldiers," and the horse and soldier statue near the west entrance.

The current layout of Fort Lowell Park is comprised of Hohokam archaeology sites, ruins from the Fort Lowell Military Base period, and modern recreation amenities. The western entrance to the park features a gateway constructed of stone masonry walls with two metal gates. An iron statue of a soldier blowing a horn on a horse is located north of the west entrance. This statue was placed at this location in February of 1991 and is in good condition. The statue itself stands on a brown limestone slab base that is beginning to deteriorate. The western side of Fort Lowell Park also includes a stone plinth with a bronze colored plaque commemorating the service of the “rugged pioneer soldiers”. This plaque was erected in May of 1965 and is in good condition. Also located in this portion of the park are adobe remains from other structures built during the fort’s commissioning.

Two-bathroom structures are in the main area of the park. Constructed of masonry unit walls with metal doors, each contains three individual stalls for females and three for males. Adjacent to these buildings is a rest area with a concession stand that opens during organized games in the park. Benches, charcoal grills, ramadas, and two water fountains are adjacent to the area. ADA accessible workout stations are located throughout the park and develop a park-wide workout network. The softball field features two dugouts and a fenced area that designates the field boundaries.

The northeastern portion of Fort Lowell Park is bound by N Orchard River Drive. It contains a pecan orchard with 40 mature, evenly spaced pecan trees. Although the origin of the pecan orchard not known, it dates to at least the 1970s. Within this area there are eight picnic tables constructed of concrete with barbeque stations. To the southeast of the orchard is a parking area, utilized for daytime parking. A manmade water feature is located east of the pecan orchard. The design includes a pond that separates into two individual streams varying in size from four to six feet wide. These two streams empty into a larger pond at a lower elevation. Pedestrian bridges provide access to cross the streams and meander to the other side of the feature. On the northeast edge of the pecan orchard is a maintenance building surrounded by a chain link fence with maintenance equipment inside. Located west of the maintenance shed is an educational site with the outline of a Hohokam house depicted on the ground the outline is approximately 14 feet by 14 feet. This site is surrounded by educational signs detailing the history the Hohokam peoples in the region.

A pond is located along the northern border of Fort Lowell Park and hosts a variety of local wildlife ranging from small fish to ducks. The oval-shaped pond is approximately 200 feet by 250 feet and has a fountain in the center. A gravel circulation path with memorial benches surrounds the pond. Towards the northeastern side of the pond, there is a small ocotillo fence that encloses the maintenance controls for the water feature in the pond. A seating area with planters is south of this area.

A drainage wash runs across the upper portion of this area and drains rain and storm runoff from the southwest of the park towards the northeast eventually emptying into the Pantano Wash. Heavy rain during monsoon season floods the Pantano wash and provides water to irrigate the trees in the area. Topography throughout the park is flat with grassy areas and clusters of trees. Vegetation throughout the park may be broken down into three categories: riparian, native, and invasive. The riparian vegetation, which has remained relatively constant throughout the history of the site, has been preserved around Fort Lowell Park and contains native, as well as some introduced, species. These areas feature palm trees, ash trees, willow trees, grasses, reeds, acacia, and sycamore. Other species found at the park are velvet mesquite, canyon hackberry, creosote, prickly pear, cholla, saguaro, and barrel cactus. blue palo verde trees, Mexican palo verde trees, yucca, aleppo pine, eucalyptus, Chilean mesquite, juniper, Chinese pistache, mulberry, and southern live oak.

History: The first settlers in the area of the fort were the Hohokam people who resided here from around 300 AD to around 1250 AD. The Hohokam farmed along the rivers and traces of early irrigation ditches have been found throughout the park, correlating with dates of the surrounding kivas and pit house remains, as well as burial sites. The original inhabitants used the land to cultivate corn, wheat, vegetables, agave, and cotton. In addition to agricultural uses, the Hohokam depended heavily upon the natural foraging opportunities located on this site. Mesquite tree seed pods contributed to the Hohokam diet and were ground into flour. Native animal species of deer, rabbit, and a variety of birds were also part of the diet. Most of the built environment from the Hohokam period was destroyed when the area was established as a military fort, although some excavated sites have revealed evidence of pit houses, materials, goods, and fragments of ceramic art. Some of these excavated areas have remained uncovered and interpreted for the public.

A military post was first established in 1856 by the United States Army near the Arizona Territorial capital of Tucson. The purpose of the Fort was for protection against Apaches who raided the land, as well as for creating a military supply depot for neighboring forts before the railroad's arrival. The original site was located in the heart of downtown Tucson near what is now called Military Plaza and is in the Armory Park neighborhood. In 1862, the Fort became a permanent establishment, and was soon after called Camp Lowell, named after General Charles Russell Lowell, a Union General during the American Civil War who was mortally wounded during the Battle of Cedar Creek in 1864.

The original site for the Fort Lowell camp stretched over 80 square miles and sat along the Pantano, Tanque Verde, and Rillito washes, which provided a perennial source of water at the time. According to the National Register of Historic Places nomination for Fort Lowell, the grounds of this site flourished with rich soil that

was very suitable for growing plants. Grama and sabayon grasses were planted and used for the cavalry horses and stock feed on the post.

Due to sanitary issues stemming from contamination of the nearby wells in the early 1870s, Camp Lowell was relocated six miles to the northeast near the confluence of the Pantano and Tanque Verde washes with the Rillito River to the present-day site of Fort Lowell Park. With a continual supply of clean water for drinking and agricultural use, this location was a better fit for Camp Lowell. However, construction of the permanent camp was delayed due to heavy monsoon rains in 1873 and because of a recall of military funding. The plan of the new camp mimicked the layout of a typical southwestern military post with its adobe buildings erected around a rectangular parade ground. In addition to the military post, the United States Army also established an 80 square mile reservation that stretched 10 miles east of the Fort toward the Rincon Mountains. The boundaries for this reservation were identified through the common military practice of using rock cairns as a symbol for land ownership.

Fort Lowell served a crucial social and economic role outside the military post itself. A small community developed outside the base to provide services to those on the base. John B. "Pie" Allen, an early political and economic actor, and later Mayor of Tucson, built his Sutler's Store on his farm, which was adjacent to the Fort, in 1873. Several of the original residential buildings constructed during this period are still extant in the Fort Lowell Historic District neighborhood.

Soldiers themselves provided much of the labor to build Fort Lowell. The first adobe buildings built on site were situated at the western corner of the parade ground in 1873. This eventually became the guardhouse. The flagstaff was brought from the old Camp Lowell and raised on December 27, 1873. The first officer's quarters and kitchen were constructed and finished in 1874.

Also in 1874, three officer's quarters were built on the site. These buildings were 43 by 54 feet single-story residences constructed from adobe bricks coated with tan-colored stucco. Design features of the buildings included three windows on the sides with two windows and a door at the front of the structure. The roofs were flat with red brick parapets and exteriors were observed to have metal canals, elevated water tanks, and chimneys. Fencing made from wood and cacti enclosed the residences. Original plans show that at the rear of each officer's quarter was a mess room, kitchen, pantry, and servant's room.

Six additional officer's quarters were then built in 1877 that measured 43 by 40 feet. During this period, adobe walls were constructed behind the structures to divide the buildings and create separation on-site. In 1883, the quarters were improved by plastering the interior walls, laying wood floors, and adding porches.

The soldiers constructed the hospital in 1874 out of rammed earth in the

traditional Southwest Territorial style. The technique of utilizing rammed earth is a common architectural element throughout the structures built during the fort's establishment. The main building contained 13 rooms with a general ward for patients on the northern end. The southern section contained a surgeon's office, steward's quarters, dispensary, isolation ward, and store rooms. A detached kitchen was built on the west end of the hospital. Design elements for these structures emphasized Victorian architectural styles and featured materials such as mud-brick and adobe. In 1879, 15 white columns were added to the front of the building to support an exterior porch. A wooden picket fence surrounded the hospital. A year later, the arrival of the railroad in Tucson made metals such as tin available, allowing soldiers to install tin roofs over the mud adobe on the hospital and kitchen to protect the buildings from the summer monsoon storms. The adobe remains of the hospital walls are currently protected by a chain link fence to prevent vandalism.

The fort's parade grounds were located directly in front of the officer's quarters. On the south side of the grounds stood the flagstaff. During the years of 1875-1880, a double row of cottonwood trees and vegetation were planted to line the road leading to the parade grounds, but these landscape elements were later removed.

Cottonwood Lane, a small dirt road that led into the Fort, was planted with an allée of cottonwood trees around the late 1870s and served as an example of a designed landscape. Pima County is currently in the process of recreating this landscape with mature cottonwoods and a dirt path to resemble the original Cottonwood Lane.

The name Camp Lowell was eventually changed to Fort Lowell in 1879. After Geronimo's surrender in 1886 and the looming threat of Apache raids was declared subdued, the United States Army decommissioned Fort Lowell in January of 1891 because its use was no longer deemed necessary. The exit of the Army resulted in the deterioration of the existing built environment and a scavenge of resources by groups of people passing by in search of lumber, tin, and other valuable building materials.

Following the abandonment of Fort Lowell in 1891, the property was disposed of by the United States Department of the Interior. Many of the buildings were stripped of their useful components and quickly fell into ruin. By the early 1920s, except for a few structures, the fort's buildings were in disrepair from the effects of natural elements and vandalism.

Around 1908, Tennessee couple Dolly and Dixie Cate came to Tucson after Dixie became ill with tuberculosis. After Dixie succumbed to the illness, his wife Dolly acquired property in the southwest corner of the park and established "Mrs. Cate's Tuberculosis Sanatorium" in the former officer's quarters. This facility continued

until 1928 when the property was sold to Harvey and Fronia Adkins who kept the land as a sanatorium until 1950 under the name "Adkins Rest Ranch." In addition, "Pie" Allen's general store was converted to a sanatorium in 1916 by Mrs. Nellie Swan who named her property "Swan Ranch." Mrs. Swan's establishment stopped being used as a sanitarium soon after it was sold in 1925. The Bolsius family from California purchased the old Swan sanatorium and restored the building into a private home; their restoration efforts also included the old Commissary Storehouse that was converted into apartments and artist studios in the 1940s.

In 1915, a Mormon community settled to the west of the fort and they built a schoolhouse in the now historic district of Binghampton near the Rillito River. Around this time, a Mexican-American community developed just west of the former fort and constructed the San Pedro Chapel, a structure on the National Register of Historic Places, out of rammed earth. This chapel was destroyed by a tornado in 1929 but was reconstructed using the same materials a few years later.

Fort Lowell had also been a location for filmmakers during the silent era of film. The now-lost film *Headin' South* (1918) starring Douglas Fairbanks and directed by Allan Dwan, as well as *Chasing Rainbows* (1919) directed by Frank Beal were shot at the old Fort.

By the 1920s, the Fort was showing signs of disrepair, and the task of saving the existing adobe structures was handed to the State Land Board. The first preservation efforts at the fort began in 1929 after the Arizona Senate passed a bill that protected 40 acres of the park from being sold. This bill was enacted in 1931 when the State Land Board gave 40 acres of the fort to the University of Arizona to maintain the area under the jurisdiction of a state park. Repairs were made by students of the archaeological department at the University of Arizona and the Arizona Archaeological and Historical Society to fill in missing pieces of the adobe in some of the buildings and to fix the old well and encase it with cement. A board had also been created to fence off the area and fix the existing fort and military hospital with adobe.

In 1944, the abandoned property was auctioned off to George Babbitt Jr., a member of the pioneering Babbitt family of Flagstaff. Babbitt wanted the Boy Scouts to have the old fort as a campground, so he returned the land to the State Land Department to put Fort Lowell on the auction block the following year so that the Boy Scouts organization could purchase it. In 1957, the Boy Scouts sold 37 acres of their property to Pima County to create Fort Lowell Park while retaining three acres of their land for small campground use.

The Boy Scouts were also a key player in the history of Fort Lowell by buying the fort site from George Babbitt in 1945. After purchasing land in the park, the Boy Scouts attempted to help preserve the ruins of the hospital structure by building a

metal ramada over the hospital to protect the adobe from the monsoon rains. During this period, efforts were made to plant trees and maintain the vegetation. By 1957, the Boy Scouts realized the cost to maintain the old fort was too expensive and sold all but three acres of their land to Pima County.

Pima County opened Fort Lowell Park in 1957 to the public. A Veterans Memorial Plaque dedicated to soldiers of all wars erected in 1958 by the Pima County Board of Supervisors stands on the southwest corner of the hospital. The plaque is juxtaposed in a brown-colored concrete column that stands around seven feet tall and three feet wide. This plaque is now nearly sixty years old and has evidence of weathering with some corrosion on its face.

Development in other parts of the park continued in 1961, starting with the construction of a deep well turbine pump for watering the area to promote grass growth. Starting in 1963, the Pima County Parks Department began to reconstruct the commanding officer's quarters and kitchen to use as a military museum. The original buildings had been destroyed by fire. The museum is currently operated by the Arizona Historical Society. The museum displays artifacts that have been excavated from the site. In 1963, sewer lines were installed within the park. A swimming pool, wading pool, and bathhouse were built, and a small pond was constructed in 1967 because the sewers were not big enough to handle the pool overflow. Today, the public swimming pool is bounded by a metal fence with an office structure and outdoor locker rooms located to the west. The office building is constructed of fired adobe brick with a flat roof. The entrance to the pool is west of the building and features a cement sidewalk area. To the east of the pool area are concrete tennis and racquetball courts.

During the 1970s, ramadas, baseball fields, six pee-wee league fields, playground equipment, and tennis courts were added to the park to enhance recreational activities on the site. In 1972, Pima County bought the last three acres owned by the Boy Scouts, ending the official connection between the Boy Scouts and Fort Lowell. Pima County transferred Fort Lowell Park to the City of Tucson in 1984. In 2010, Fort Lowell Park received a consultation from the Department of Environmental Quality that would outline what needed to be done to remediate the site of some of the old officer's quarters of Fort Lowell that had been home to the sanitarium and a steel mill. Due to the steel mills' improper waste disposal, much of the site had been covered in metal debris that made it dangerous for recreation. However, in recent years, remediation of the site has taken place and preservation plans have been put in place to better serve the public.

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Figure 1: Original adobe hospital, facing west. (Fermin Garcia, 3/24/18)



Figure 2: Fort Lowell History Museum, facing west. (Fermin Garcia, 3/24/18)



Figure 3: Newer restrooms, facing south. (Fermin Garcia, 3/24/18)



Figure 4: Statue at west entrance to park, facing northeast. (Fermin Garcia, 3/24/18)



Figure 5: Pond, facing south. (Graham John, 3/24/18)



Figure 6: West entrance and gate, facing northeast. (Tyler Wardell, 3/24/18)



Figure 7: Public Swimming Pool, facing north. (Tyler Wardell, 3/24/18)



Figure 8: Veterans Memorial Plaque, facing northwest. (Fermin Garcia, 3/24/18)



Figure 9: Man-made water feature, facing northeast. (Madalyn Welch, 3/24/18)

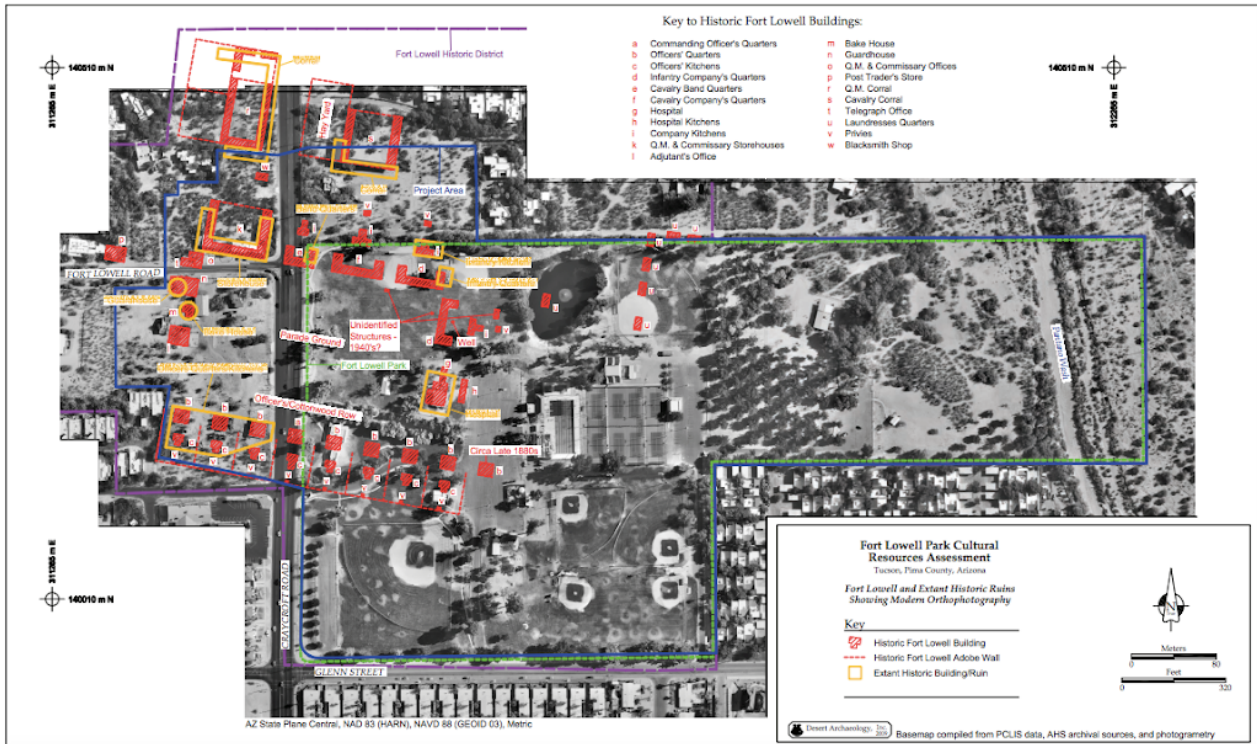


Figure 10: Aerial photograph with overlay of historic Fort boundaries and buildings. Compliments of Desert Archeology.