

Fort Southwest Point

History

The first military post in this area dates to 1792 when a blockhouse was constructed about one-half mile upstream from the present fort site on the boundary of U.S. Territory and the Cherokee Nation as defined by a 1791 treaty. The blockhouse was located near the North Carolina Road or Avery Trace which ran westward to the “settlements” on the Cumberland River at present day Nashville.

In 1796 two events impacted military operations in Tennessee: Tennessee became a state and the U.S. Congress passed legislation intended to regulate trade with the Indian tribes and preserve peace on the frontier. The U.S. government began to increase the number of federal troops in Tennessee to protect Cherokee Indians’ rights and preserve the peace.

Fort Southwest Point was constructed in 1797 to accommodate the increasing numbers of troops assigned to eastern Tennessee. It was located in Kingston, Tennessee, overlooking the Clinch and Tennessee Rivers. At its peak there were 625 soldiers stationed there. It became the headquarters for federal troops in Tennessee under the command of Colonel David Henly. It was located in what was considered Cherokee Indian Territory. Troops initially served as peacekeepers by providing escort services for white settlers. This role changed as troops were required to ensure that settlers did not illegally settle on Cherokee- owned lands. Troops also began to protect Cherokee rights by forcibly removing white settlers who had illegally settled on Cherokee lands.

- The first two commanding officers at Fort Southwest Point were Captains Wade and Sparks, stationed in Knoxville.
- Several treaties with the Cherokee were negotiated and signed at Fort Southwest Point, and Roane County’s first post office was located here.
- The first Indian school was located at the fort site to teach the Indian children to read and write.
- In 1802 the fort continued to serve as a base of military operations and as the Cherokee Indian Agency. Goods were distributed, not only to the Cherokees, but to passing groups from other Indian tribes.
- In 1803 four soldiers from Fort Southwest Point were chosen and detached for duty to serve as members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.
- In 1804 Captain Howell Cobb became the last Commanding officer of Fort Southwest Point.

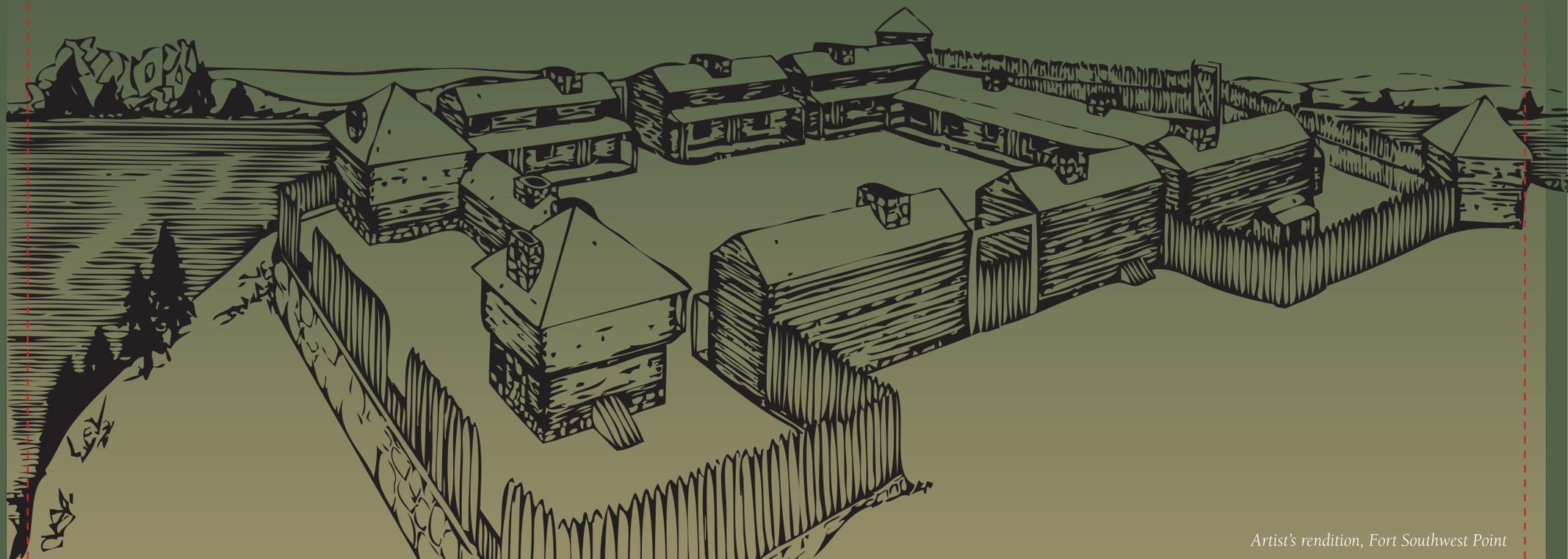
The Fort continued as a major army post until 1806 when a large reduction of troops occurred. A small number of troops were stationed here each year until 1811 when it is believed military use of the garrison came to an end.

Preserving Cherokee Indian Rights

This period in the Fort’s history began in 1801 with the arrival of Colonel Return Jonathan Meigs to serve as both Agent for the War Department in Tennessee and Indian Agent to the Cherokees. Meigs, an exceptionally fair-minded man, worked to honor the Cherokee land rights and preserve peace between Indians and settlers. Colonel Meigs eventually won the respect of the Cherokees who called him “The White Path” as a symbol of their respect.

Restoration

Owned and operated by the City of Kingston, Fort Southwest Point is being restored on its original foundations. Restoration began in 1974 with an archaeological investigation that exposed portions of foundations of six fort buildings and amassed a sizable collection of fort-period artifacts. Two later digs revealed the locations of thirteen buildings.



Artist's rendition, Fort Southwest Point