A Frontier Fort Revived
*Restorations and a new visitors center bring Fort Chadbourne back to life.*

**DURING THE PAST DECADE, WEST TEXAS RANCHERS** Garland and Lana Richards gradually restored six historic structures on the frontier fort which their family has owned since the 1870s. The revival of Fort Chadbourne culminated in April with the opening of a 12,500-square-foot visitors center, which retells the fascinating story of the military garrison. The U.S. Army established Fort Chadbourne in 1852 to protect settlers and travelers against Indian attack. It housed Confederate soldiers during the Civil War, then the Army abandoned it in 1868.

Restored structures include a company barracks and an officer’s quarters where interior plaster walls bear graffiti from the 1870s. The Richards also completed Texas’ only restoration of a Butterfield Overland Mail stage stop, which operated at the fort from 1858 to 1861. The new visitors center displays some of the half-million artifacts found on the fort site. It boasts a large antique gun collection with dozens of early Sharps and Winchester rifles. Visitors also can view an old saloon, a stagecoach, and a medal of honor exhibit, as well as the center’s 1,200-square-foot research center.

An annual festival, Fort Chadbourne Days (the last weekend of May), attracts reenactors who replicate frontier fort life. Fort Chadbourne is located off US 277 approximately 47 miles southwest of Abilene. Call 325/473-5311; www.fortchadbourne.org.

---Randy Mallory

**RESOURCE:**
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