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A CALM LAKE ON THE NAVASOTA RIVER, A QUIET GRAVEYARD FULL OF MEMORIES, SECLUDED SPRINGS GUARDED BY LARGE BUR OAK TREES. ALL OF THESE ARE PART OF THE TRANQUILITY OF FORT PARKER STATE PARK. YET THE PARK ALSO REFLECTS THE CHALLENGES AND CONFLICTS OF THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN LIMESTONE COUNTY DURING THE SETTLEMENT OF THE FRONTIER, THE AFTERMATH OF RECONSTRUCTION AND THE ECONOMIC DEVASTATION OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION.



Fort Parker State Park is a great place to spend the day with your children. Whether you are looking for a shady picnic spot with room for the kids to run-and-play, spectacular hiking trails, or a visit to our Nature Center, there is plenty of fun for the entire family. Visitors can enjoy fishing, mountain biking, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, bird-watching, swimming, and many other outdoor activities. Historic Springfield Cemetery, located within the park, is a reminder of a once clamoring city. In 1860, Springfield's population of 4,537 was over twice the population of Dallas, Texas (2,000) and rivaling the city of Houston (4,845) at that time. We offer weekly interpretive programs about the native wildlife and unique cultural history during peak season. Amenities include facilities for camping – including a Boy Scout Wilderness Area, picnicking, family and large group events. Playgrounds, group barracks and dining hall, open pavilion, and a recreation hall provide modern comforts for most any size group. The park's Annual Trout Clinic is a favorite for young fishing enthusiasts – what a thrill to catch your first rainbow trout!

Fort Parker State Park  
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INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

# FORT PARKER

## STATE PARK



## NATURAL CROSSROADS



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Early Mexican land grants described plentiful springs, prairies and woodlands along the Navasota River. With water and timber available, pioneers like the John Parker family claimed the lands at this natural crossroads where the grasses of the Blackland Prairie mingle with the woodlands of the Post Oak Savannah. Logs of cedar were stacked and notched, chinked and daubed to make cabins. South of the river, the Parker family built a large stockade to protect their families and livestock.

The area was also a crossroads for Native Americans. The Comanche warriors who ruled the Great Plains crossed the Navasota River north of here to raid the Parker family stockade. On the morning of May 19, 1836, a band of Comanches, Kiowas and Kichais attacked the Parker Fort. Five settlers died and another five were kidnapped, including nine-year-old Cynthia Ann Parker.

## SPRINGFIELD

Once a bustling county seat boasting a stage line, college, weekly newspaper and several hotels, the community of Springfield thrived from the 1840s through the 1860s.

But the Civil War changed life in Springfield. Businesses closed as men joined the Confederate army. After local plantation owner Logan Stroud read the Emancipation Proclamation from the steps of his Bur Oak Springs plantation, racial conflicts and martial law plagued the community during the years of Reconstruction. Springfield found new life as a community of African-American freedmen after the railroad bypassed the town for Mexia and Groesbeck.

Today all that remains of Springfield are the springs and the cemetery. Towering trees shade the graves of former Springfield residents including plantation owners, African-American freedmen, and early Texas Revolution veterans Sanders Walker and Joseph Penn Lynch.



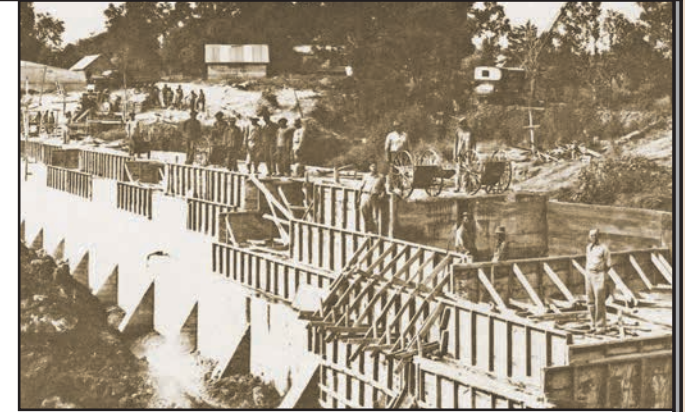
Grave of Logan Stroud's infant daughter, 1861.

## CAMP MEXIA

With local economies struggling during the Great Depression, Limestone County businessmen sought a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp to build a recreational park near the historic site of Parker's fort.

The young men of Civilian Conservation Corps Camp 3807 (C) reported to Camp Mexia in July of 1935. The "C" stood for "Colored," and 3807 was one of the first segregated camps of young African-American men. Most of the two hundred young men were from the Limestone County area, many the sons of sharecroppers struggling to

The Parker family story is told at the nearby Old Fort Parker Restoration.



The young men of Civilian Conservation Corps Camp 3807 (C) built a dam across the Navasota River creating Lake Fort Parker.

survive in farming communities like Mart and Coolidge, Teague and Springfield. Of the \$30 a recruit earned each month, \$25 was sent home to support his family.

Camp Mexia had its own sawmill and limestone quarry, using local rock and timber to build the park. One of the camp's first projects was building a replica of the Parker stockade and cabins for the Texas Centennial celebration in 1936. Then Camp Mexia work crews tackled one of the most ambitious CCC projects in Texas, building a 423-foot dam of limestone, concrete and earth across the Navasota River, creating 750-acre Lake Fort Parker. The CCC also built the roads, picnic areas, the park concession building and bath house. Most of the work was done by hand, digging with pickaxes and shovels and hauling rocks and cement in "Georgia buggies," deep wheelbarrows with two wheels.

Life wasn't all work at Camp Mexia. In the evenings, the men could get passes to go into town or go home. Many earned their high school diplomas in night classes with the camp teacher. Occasionally women from Mexia and Groesbeck were invited to dances on the open terrace of the concession building. There, camp musicians created the big band sounds of Count Basie with saxophones, trumpets and clarinets. CCC men with shoes shined and ties straight at evening inspections were rewarded with cake and ice cream on Friday afternoons. Unless they drew kitchen police duty for disciplinary infractions, the young men used weekend passes to go home.

