

Fort Scott

From military outpost to thriving city

Fort Scott tells America's story during a critical time in its growth. When the fort was established, most of the nation's population lived east of the Mississippi. However, soon soldiers from Fort Scott would be part of westward expansion. "Bleeding Kansas," and ultimately the Civil War. Fort Scott emerged from these crises as a prominent town in the new State of Kansas.

Early Settlement

Early in the nation's growth, eastern Native American tribes were forced west of the Missouri River in return for lands "guaranteed" free of white settlers. Established in 1842 and, named after General Winfield Scott, Fort Scott was one of several forts, including Fort Leavenworth to the north, which enforced this "permanent Indian frontier" in what was then unorganized territory. The fort's role was to keep white

settlers out and make sure relations with and between relocated tribes like the Miami, New York Indians, Potawatomi, and Ottawa and local tribes, like the Osage, remained peaceful. Typically Fort Scott housed both a company of infantry and one of the dragoons, precursor to the cavalry. During the 1840s, the dragoons also helped maintain peace along the Santa Fe and Oregon trails, which passed through what is now the State of Kansas.

From 1846 to 1848, Fort Scott's troops left to fight in the Mexican-American War. Territorial gains following the war further fulfilled the vision of "Manifest Destiny," the idea that the U.S. was destined to expand from coast to coast thus making the "Indian frontier" less "permanent." The army abandoned Fort Scott shortly before Kansas territory opened to Euro-American settlement in 1854. The remaining fort buildings were sold the next year, forming the nucleus of the City of Fort Scott.

Divisions and War

It was not long before new tensions brought soldiers back to the fort as divisions grew over the question of slavery in western territories. In addition to opening the land to settlement, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 created the territories of Kansas and Nebraska and allowed settlers to vote on whether Kansas would enter the Union as a free or slave state. People on all sides of the issue flocked to Kansas Territory. Proslavery advocates came to support slavery; abolitionists came to end slavery throughout the nation; and freestaters came to stop the expansion of slavery into future states. Differences between these groups flared into violence, resulting in the "Bleeding Kansas" period from which Fort Scott was not spared.

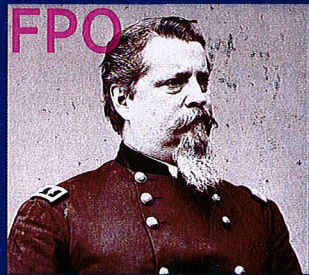
The City of Fort Scott primarily supported slavery, while freestaters and abolitionists lived in the surrounding area. Two hotels illustrated the division: the Fort Scott or "Free State" Hotel and the Western Hotel across the square, headquarters for proslavery advocates. By 1858, violence between these opposing groups brought soldiers to reestablish law and order, but they stayed only until peace was restored. This was short lived, and conflict quickly resumed. This cycle happened several times throughout 1859 until fighting slowed. Eventually, anti-slavery sentiment won, and Kansas entered the Union as a free state in 1861.

Violence occurring in Kansas soon engulfed the entire country with the outbreak of the Civil War. The U.S. Army returned to Fort Scott to establish a military base to supply troops and to protect Kansas from Confederate forces. Fort Scott also served as a hospital and haven for refugees, including Native Americans, escaped slaves, and farmers who were caught in the conflict. Many of those seeking shelter joined the Army, including the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry, the first African American regiment to fight the Confederacy. Guerrilla warfare plagued the border region, but the presence of Fort Scott spared much of the town from destruction.

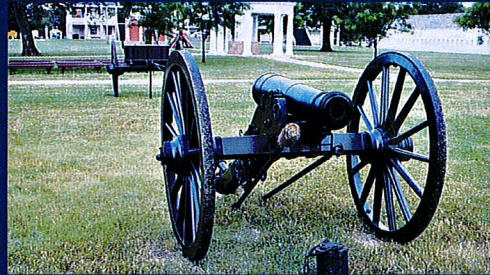
Healing the Nation and Beyond

After the Civil War, the nation began reconstruction, and railroads soon tied the continent together. The City of Fort Scott saw the railroad as an opportunity to tap into Eastern markets, and by 1869, the Missouri River, Fort Scott and Gulf Railroad reached the city. Squatters in the area fought the railroad, so the military established the Post of Southeast Kansas to protect railroad workers and business interests from 1869 to 1873.

Growing from a young and divided republic into a mature and powerful nation, the U.S. needed frontier posts like Fort Scott to complete this metamorphosis. Today, its rich history is celebrated at sites like the Fort Scott National Historic Site, the Gordon Parks Museum, and the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes.



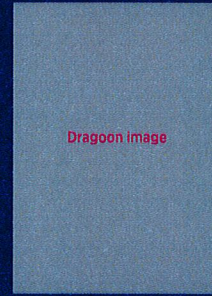
General Winfield Scott



1842 Cannon on the Grounds of Fort Scott



Fort Scott Visitor Center



Dragoon image



Photo of the Gordon Parks Museum

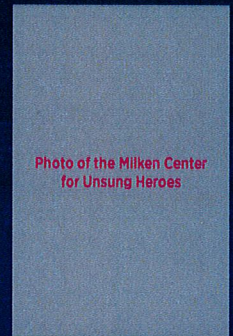


Photo of the Milken Center for Unsung Heroes



Fort Scott



Gordon Parks

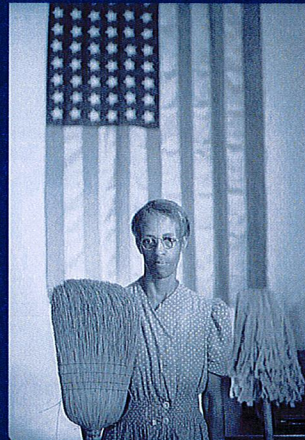
Photographer, film maker, writer, composer

Gordon Parks was born in Fort Scott, Kansas, on November 30, 1912, to Sarah and Andrew Jackson Parks. Gordon wrote, "Poppa was a dirt farmer who farmed mostly dirt, but he kept us alive and taught us about love and devotion." The youngest of 15 children, he attended local schools and left Fort Scott at sixteen after his beloved mother died.

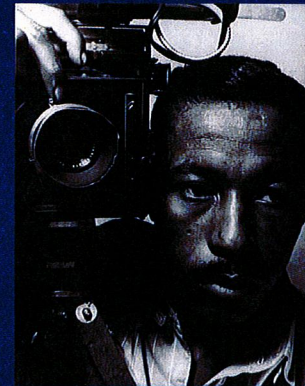
His mother's final wish for him was that he be sent to live with a sister in St. Paul, Minnesota. She knew that there, far away from the poverty and racial bigotry he had endured, he would find the inspiration their small dirt farm never provided. After a disagreement with his sister's husband, and in the brutal cold of a Minnesota winter, Gordon found himself homeless and struggling to survive by various means, including playing a piano in a brothel, mopping floors and washing store windows. He tried to finish high school in Minnesota twice.

Later while working as a waiter on a transcontinental train, he was struck by photographs in a magazine and bought his first camera, a Voigtlander Brilliant, for \$12.50 at a pawnshop. He started working in fashion and his photographs caught the eye of Marva Louis, the elegant wife of heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis. She encouraged Parks to move to Chicago in 1940, where he began a portrait business and specialized in photographs of society women.

After receiving the first fellowship in photography from the Julius Rosenwald Foundation in 1941, Gordon chose to work with Roy Stryker at the Farm Security Administration in Washington, D.C. It was at the FSA that Gordon took his first professional photograph, "American Gothic." This memorable photograph of charwoman Ella Watson standing before the American flag holding a mop and broom became his signature image.



Parks' American Gothic, Washington D.C.

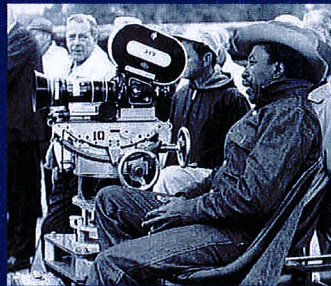
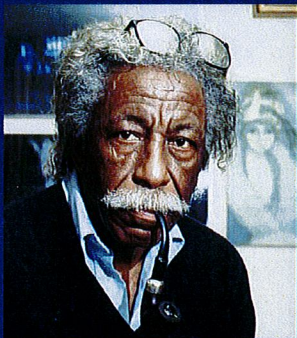


A young Gordon Parks with his camera



Gordon Parks Museum

More can be learned about this renowned artist at the Gordon Parks Museum in the Fine Arts Center of Fort Scott Community College (2108 S. Horton Street). Part of the college's Gordon Parks Center for Culture and Diversity, the Museum celebrates the life and works of the famous photographer, filmmaker, writer, poet, and musician, while teaching about artistic creativity and cultural awareness. The centerpiece of the museum is the Gordon Parks Collection, began when Parks gave the Center some of his photos, including iconic works such as *American Gothic*, *Tuskegee Airmen*, and *Ali Sweating*. After his death in 2006, additional personal effects and memorabilia were passed on, including his film camera, a tripod, and writing desk. The collection includes the largest collection of his signed work outside the Library of Congress and helps preserve and protect his legacy.



Parks in the Director's Chair

When the FSA closed in 1943, Parks became a freelance photographer, balancing work for fashion magazines with his passion for documenting humanitarian issues. His 1948 photo essay on the life of a Harlem gang leader won him widespread acclaim and a position as the first African-American staff photographer and writer for LIFE Magazine, then by far the most prominent photojournalist publication in the world. Parks would remain at LIFE Magazine for two decades, chronicling subjects related to racism and poverty, as well as taking memorable pictures of celebrities and politicians.

His talents also led him to filmmaking, writing, music and poetry. He was the first African-American to direct a film for a major studio, Warner Brothers. Based on his biographical novel, *The Learning Tree*, Parks penned the screenplay

and composed the musical score, along with producing and directing the film. That, his first full-length film, was shot in Fort Scott, and is based on his childhood there. More films were to follow, including *Shaft*, *Leadbelly* and others.

Also to his credit is a piano concerto, a symphony for orchestra, a ballet honoring Martin Luther King and twenty-three books. He received the National Medal of Arts from President Reagan in 1988. Parks spent much of the last three decades of his life expanding his style and conducting experiments with color photography. He continued to work up until his death in 2006. He received over 50 honorary doctorates in his lifetime--a testament to living a life of overcoming barriers and achieving outstanding success both artistically and professionally.

