



## NHL Executive Summary



<b>Name of Property:</b>	Fort Brown NHL (Additional Documentation and Boundary Increase)
<b>City, State:</b>	Brownsville, Texas
<b>Period of Significance:</b>	1846-1917
<b>NHL Criteria:</b>	1 (NHL Criteria Exception: 2)
<b>NHL Theme:</b>	I. Peopling Places 3. migration from outside and within 5. ethnic homelands 6. encounters, conflicts, and colonization IV. Shaping the Political Landscape 3. military institutions and activities VIII. Changing Role of the United States in the World Community 1. international relations 3. expansionism and imperialism 4. immigration and emigration policies
<b>Previous Recognition:</b>	1960 National Historic Landmark  1966 National Register of Historic Places



1986 National Historic Landmark (boundary study approved)

**National Historic Context:** Westward Expansion and Extension of the National Boundaries to the Pacific, 1830-1898: The Texas Revolution and Mexican War 1820-1853 (1959)  
Political and Military Affairs, 1865-1912 (1963)  
Scientific Discoveries and Inventions (Vol. 1) (1964)  
African American Soldiers in the U.S. Army in the American West, 1866-1891 [draft]  
American Latinos and the Making of the United States: A Theme Study (2013)

### NHL Significance:

- Fort Brown NHL was critical in the opening battles of the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848), contested during the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865), and a guardian of the U.S. border in the period from the First Cortina War (1859) to the violence of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917). Border conflicts between 1846 and 1917 highlight Fort Brown as significant in the areas of military history and American Latino ethnic heritage.
- When U.S. Brevet Brigadier General Zachary Taylor and his Army of Occupation began construction of the Fort Brown earthworks on the north bank of the Rio Grande in 1846, it served as a physical declaration that the United States intended to defend its claim to the disputed territory between the Rio Nueces and the Rio Grande. Its location on the river's peninsular curve immediately across from the Mexican port of Matamoros was prominent strategically as well as symbolically.
- Fort Brown was at the center of direct conflict arising from ethnic and economic tensions along the Rio Grande into the twentieth century. It represented not only a U.S. stronghold but an assertion of intimidation along the U.S.-Mexico border that led to Mexico losing over half of its territory.
- The Fort Brown NHL nomination update revises the discontinuous district boundaries to encompass archeological and cultural landscape resources identified in studies completed in 2012. The boundaries of discontinuous sections A, B, and C are similar to those selected in the 1986 documentation. Section A is the most revised, enlarged to include the entire peninsula formed by a large bend in the Rio Grande as an intact historic site with original earthworks. Section B retains the boundary it received in 1986. A portion of Section C has been withdrawn because it has lost the characteristics for which it was designated originally, justifying its removal from the NHL in accordance with 36 CFR 65.8(b) and §65.9(b)(1).

### Integrity:

- The Fort Brown NHL with its three discontinuous areas retains excellent integrity to its period of significance. Portions of the remaining earthworks of the 1846 Fort Brown are clearly visible above ground, despite impacts from flooding, shifting of the Rio Grande, twentieth-century levee construction, and its location within a now closed golf course. In addition to geophysical archeological investigations suggesting substantial potential for subsurface integrity, Fort Brown's integrity is also conveyed through the cultural landscape which retains character-defining features such as the view to the church in Matamoros. The general spatial configuration remains present.



- Other contributing resources of the Fort Brown NHL are buildings on the later fort site, now the campus of Texas Southmost College. Dating from 1868 through 1905, these buildings represent the full development of Fort Brown in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the frame Commandant's Quarters and brick Hospital, Medical Laboratory, Linen Storage/Morgue, Commissary, Commissary Annex, Chapel, and Cavalry Barracks.
- The Commandant's Quarters was moved to its present location from a position further to the west, and the Chapel has been twice relocated. The moved buildings have been rehabilitated to their historic appearance, and their relocation prevented demolition or disassociation with the other remaining buildings of the fort. Thus, although moved, they meet NHL Exception 2, retaining integrity of setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association with the period of significance.
- Other remaining buildings are in their original locations and retain the balance of their historic character-defining features. The college has rehabilitated buildings for administrative use with sensitivity and recognizes their historic significance. The Cavalry Barracks in Section B is separate from the majority of extant buildings (Section C) due to intervening modern construction. However, the remaining buildings are clearly recognizable as a historic collection distinctive in their appearance. Materials and design exhibit their relationship to one another and their identity as a significant part of the post-Civil War Fort Brown installation.

**Owner of Property:** International Boundary and Water Commission  
Texas Southmost College/Southmost Union Junior College

**Acreage of Property:** 191 acres

**Origins of Nomination:** The NPS Heritage Partnerships Program, working in cooperation with Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park, sought to prepare an updated NHL nomination for Fort Brown NHL to reflect changes to the NHL (removal and relocation of contributing buildings) and to incorporate more recent research (national historic contexts, cultural landscape studies, and geophysical investigations).

**Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** This update to the NHL nomination revises the boundary so as to reflect current conditions. The documentation also provides a broader interpretation of Fort Brown's military significance through updated scholarship, and expands how Fort Brown highlights the American Latino experience, including land claims that preceded its construction, the importance of Dr. William C. Gorgas and his research at Fort Brown, and the role Fort Brown played in the 1906 Brownsville Raid that was fueled by racist ideologies. The updated nomination makes a more holistic and representative case for Fort Brown's national significance.

**Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** None known.

**Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of December 19, 2023):**

- Ramon Macias III, P.E., Principal Engineer, Office of the Commissioner, United States Section, International Boundary and Water Commission
- Oralia Z. Fernandez, Superintendent, Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park
- Mark Wolfe, State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission



**Landmarks Committee Comments:**

- Add additional context in a separate sub-heading related to the 1906 Brownsville Affair, including as related to the subsequent removal and erasure of the Brownsville veterans' cemetery to Alexandria, LA.
- Consider how later buildings express regional architectural characteristics.

**Landmarks Committee Recommendation:**

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the acceptance of the NHL updated documentation for the Fort Brown National Historic Landmark in Brownsville, Texas, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

**Advisory Board Recommendation:**