

Fort Lowell–Adkins Property: From Past to Present

In 2006, the City of Tucson acquired the last major portion of historic Fort Lowell in private ownership, planning to convert the 5.5-acre parcel into a cultural park. However, for 70 years, the property was used for steel tank manufacturing, leaving behind soil impacted with polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), arsenic, and lead. The City of Tucson's Environmental Services department obtained a grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfields Cleanup Program to remediate the site.

A backhoe carefully stripped away contaminated soil that was removed to a landfill. Soil tests verified that the contaminated areas were cleared and safe for public visitation. Archaeologists monitored the removal of the soil and discovered evidence for more than 1,000 years of human activity.

A Hohokam Village: The Hardy Site

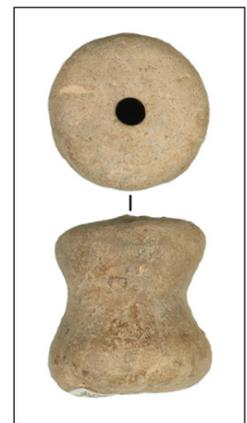
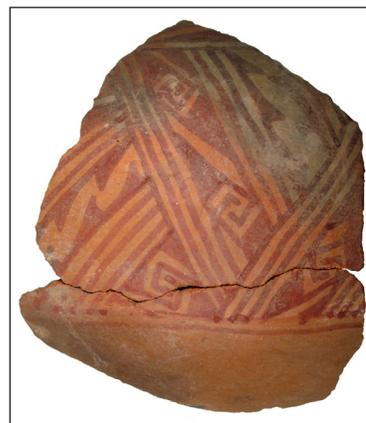
Rillito Creek drew people to this area. Today, the creek is dry, but historically, water ran along it year-round. Native Americans dug ditches from the Rillito to irrigate fields of corn, beans, squash, and cotton.

Nearby, the Hohokam dug shallow foundation pits for their homes, placing posts to hold up the walls and roof, smearing mud plaster on the walls, and smoothing the floor with grinding stones. An entrance led to a small plastered hearth just inside. Ten houses were discovered, dating from A.D. 950 to around 1200, and seven were excavated.

Most of the houses had burned with pottery vessels and grinding stones on their floors. One house contained pottery-making tools and raw materials for manufacturing vessels for local use and trade.



Top: Archaeologists document a pit structure; the entrance is to the right, and the fire hearth is surrounded by pieces of a broken jar (photo by Henry D. Wallace). Bottom: Through time, the shape of the houses changed from rounded corners to rectangular (photo by Allen Denoyer).



Left: Burned wall plaster preserves 1,000-year-old fingerprints (photo by J. Homer Thiel). Middle: Tanque Verde Red-on-brown pottery sherd that dates to about A.D. 1200 (photo by Robert B. Ciaccio). Right: Spindle whorls suggest textile manufacturing (photo by Robert B. Ciaccio).

Fort Lowell

In 1873, the military established Fort Lowell near Rillito Creek. Soldiers were put to work building barracks, stables, a hospital, and administrative buildings. The southwest corner of the fort contained three of the Officer's Quarters with their kitchens and latrines. Also present were the Adjutant's office, the Bakery, and the Guardhouse. Cavalry soldiers stationed at the Fort patrolled the Tucson area and occasionally fought Apache warriors. In 1891, five years after Geronimo's surrender, the fort was closed and the buildings were sold at an auction.

In 2012, archaeologists located a garden area in front of the Officer's Quarters and an adobe wall that limited access to the officers' homes. To the north was Cottonwood Row, a lane bordered by shallow ditches, cottonwood trees, postholes for a white picket fence, and the Parade Ground, all seen in 1880s photographs. Remnants of the Bakery and the rock foundation of the Guard House were found.

Twentieth Century

In 1907, Dixie and Dollie Cate moved from Tennessee into one of the Officer's Quarters at Fort Lowell, hoping that Tucson's dry climate would cure Dixie's tuberculosis. Unfortunately, he died in December 1908. Dollie opened Mrs. Cate's Tuberculosis Sanatorium, housing up to 10 patients in the Officers' Quarters. She sold the property to the Adkins family in 1929.

Marion and Fronia Adkins brought their 16-year-old daughter Dicey to the Cate Sanatorium in 1926, where she died a year later. The family purchased the sanatorium and operated the Adkin's Rest Ranch until the 1940s.

In 1934, Marion and his son Harry started a manufacturing business on the property, bending, welding, and riveting large flat pieces of steel into tanks and prefabricated steel structures. The business continued until 2005. The family built an adobe house, with an adjacent windmill pumping water into a tower tank for the family's use.

Future Plans

Following the environmental cleanup, Pima County is restoring one Officer's Quarters and building protective roofs over the other two. Eventually, the area will open as a cultural park.



The ruins of Officer's Quarters 2 will soon be covered by a protective roof (photo by Henry D. Wallace).



Top: White paint outlines small planting pits discovered for a garden in front of the Officer's Quarters (photo by Henry D. Wallace). Bottom left: A gilded brass tip once topped a flagstaff carried by a cavalry soldier (photo by Robert B. Ciaccio). Bottom right: For more than 30 years, a tuberculosis sanitarium operated on the property. A bottle of SUDSY ammonia was used as a disinfectant (photo by Robert B. Ciaccio).



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