

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

Spring 1998

**Review of *The Fort That Became a City: An Illustrated Reconstruction of Fort Worth, Texas, 1849- 1853* By Richard F. Selcer**

Robert Duncan

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, [rduncan1@unl.edu](mailto:rduncan1@unl.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

Duncan, Robert, "Review of *The Fort That Became a City: An Illustrated Reconstruction of Fort Worth, Texas, 1849- 1853* By Richard F. Selcer" (1998). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1991.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1991>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

this book. The forts included in the line—Graham, Gates, Croghan, Martin Scott, Inge, and Merrill—covered some three hundred miles from north to south and were built as a defensive system to control the interior of Texas and promote settlement. Fort Worth's origins were at best "humble." It began as an "outpost" for Fort Graham and was named after the estimable General William Jenkins Worth. Its garrison, however, was "always understrength and often poorly equipped, its mission vaguely defined." Selcer's accurate, well-documented narrative offers a reasonable depiction of Fort Worth's historical background. Nonetheless, devoting a book to describing a fort that did not play a prominent role in Texas history is difficult. Selcer is to be commended for complementing Fort Worth's history with general military history and colorful descriptions of the dragoons, and he does note towards the book's end that had Fort Worth ever faced a genuine threat of Indian depredations, its "mission might have been more meaningful." (There is a WPA-built memorial to a Comanche attack that never happened.) The central protagonist of the story, Major Ripley Arnold, left Fort Worth in 1852 and was shot to death by a post surgeon at Fort Graham, though no explanation for this possibly intriguing incident is provided. The fort lasted only four years and was abandoned, later to become a settlement which was to grow into Fort Worth.

The author's descriptions of living quarters, parade grounds, storehouses, quartermaster house, and buildings necessary to maintain a small fort are admirable but not compelling. Selcer notes that the temporary and "ramshackle" nature of the fort made it an "embarrassment" to officers and visitors alike. Photographs taken during this period are helpful but limited in number. Perhaps the most potentially powerful tool in reconstructing the fort would be strong drawings and diagrams of the site. Unfortunately Potter's artistic talents do not deliver. The pictorial drawings are poorly composed, many containing wildlife figures that actually detract from the focus of

*The Fort That Became a City: An Illustrated Reconstruction of Fort Worth, Texas, 1849-1853.* By Richard F. Selcer. Drawings by William B. Potter. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1995. Illustrations, photographs, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. ix + 197 pp. \$19.95 paper.

Fort Worth, the northern most outpost west of Dallas and part of a chain of forts establishing a general line from the Rio Grande north constructed during the 1850s, is the subject of

the central image. The plans and elevations are reasonably executed, however, and provide constructional information. Had the drawings measured up to the narrative of the text, *The Fort That Became a City* might have generated more interest in what is essentially a regional topic.

ROBERT DUNCAN  
Department of Architecture  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln