
ADOBE BRICK STATION

General

Most of the buildings at Fort Tejon were built of adobe bricks, including the hay and mule corrals. Good construction lumber was hard to come by and very expensive. Civilian contractors made most of the bricks at the fort in the marsh area, southeast of the park office. The Mexican and Indian contractors were paid either per brick (usually .01-.02 cents) or a flat rate per 1000. The bricks were stored behind the kitchen mess hall.

The goal of this living history demonstration is to show the students how adobe bricks were made for the buildings at Fort Tejon (on a much smaller scale!).

Adobe Brick Making

To start making adobe bricks, you will need 2-4 water- buckets, 2 forms, shovel, trowel, and mud box. The Adobe Brick Pit is located at the northwest corner of the parade ground. To make bricks, you need water, dirt, and straw. Don't use too much straw, or the bricks will not hold up. The water must be carried in wooden buckets to the adobe pit.

Adobe bricks are very susceptible to weather damage. One building built at the fort, the Band Quarters, washed away before it was completed when an unexpected rainstorm hit before the roof of the building was constructed.

- a.* Have some of the squad fetch water in 2-4 wooden buckets.
- b.* Loosen up some soil in the bottom of the pit and begin adding water - a little at a time. Have some of the squad mix the mud with their feet.
- c.* As the mixing progresses, turn the soil over with the shovel, and add a little straw and water as needed.
- d.* When the mud is about the consistency of cake icing with a good amount of straw in it, you are ready to form the bricks. Put some of the adobe into the "mud box" and have the squad drag it to a flat spot where the brick mold is.
- e.* Clear the ground of grass and twigs. Lay the form on the ground and begin packing mud in the mold using the trowel. Pack it firmly! When full, remove the form and let dry.

Adobe Brick Questions

- a.** How many bricks did it take to build a building?
(40,000 to 80,000; the Barracks Building took approximately 60,000.)
- b.** Why do you use straw?
(It provides strength to the mud.)
- c.** Who made the bricks?
(Civilian contractors, and some soldiers working for extra pay (.35 cents a day.)
- d.** How were the bricks dried?
(Either by sunshine or by kiln; if by sun, it took between 1-3 months.)
- e.** Why was adobe used?
(It was cheap, easy to come by, and easy to work with.)
- f.** How does it fare in earthquakes?
(Surprisingly well, not many of the buildings at Fort Tejon sustained severe damage during the earthquake of January 1857.)
- g.** Where are all the buildings now?
(Many were torn down, many fell down, and many “melted” when the tops of the walls became exposed, the rain began to melt the bricks. The second (upper) barracks is a good example.)