Fort Des Moines

Michael W. Vogt
sive Party. All things considered, Kasparek asserts, the La Follette po-
itical dynasty did a better job of transferring power than did either the
Roosevelts or the Kennedys.

*Fort Des Moines*, by Penelope A. LeFew-Blake. Images of America Se-
ography, index. $19.99 paper.

Reviewer Michael W. Vogt is curator at the Iowa Gold Star Military Museum
at Camp Dodge and a member of the State Historical Society of Iowa’s board
of trustees.

Fort Des Moines, completed in 1903, played a significant role in the
history of the U.S. Army. The third Iowa fort so named, the post’s his-
tory began as one of the last and largest cavalry facilities constructed
in the twentieth century. Over the following 40 years Fort Des Moines
served as the starting point for two revolutionary programs that for-
ever changed the army’s employment of African Americans and
women. On the picturesque parade ground at Fort Des Moines, long-
held racial and gender stereotypes were shattered.

LeFew-Blake’s illustrated history begins with a brief introduction
summarizing the history of Fort Des Moines No. 3, chronicling the
changing use of the fort in response to evolving military tactics, tech-
nology, and personnel use over time. The remainder of the book is
divided into four chapters illustrating the post’s role as the first train-
ing site for African American officer candidates (1917), the cavalry,
hospital, and artillery (prior to World War II), and the Women’s Army
Auxiliary Corps/Women’s Army Corps years (1942–1946), and, finally,
the structural deterioration of a once scenic military complex. Each
chapter is illustrated with period photographs and postcard images
providing a unique visual history of Fort Des Moines and its support
of U.S. military operations throughout the twentieth century.

Readers should not be misled by the book’s title and presume that
the author uniformly covers the entire history of Fort Des Moines No. 3.
LeFew-Blake devotes the majority of her text, research, and photo se-
lections to the experiences of the 72,000 women who entered the army
at the fort. All 21 bibliographic sources reference WAAC/WAC history.
That emphasis allows readers to more fully understand the early 1940s
military environment at the fort and the available billets and con-
structed amenities supporting the training, social, and military activi-
ties of the first women to enter the army at Fort Des Moines during
World War II.
The book’s primary focus on the WAAC/WACs leaves little room to explore several other interesting aspects of Fort Des Moines’s past. The 1917 African-American Officers’ Candidate School is briefly mentioned in the introduction and is represented in chapter one by only a single image. The almost forgotten efforts of Hospital 26 (1918–1919) personnel rehabilitating wounded World War I soldiers are refreshingly covered by a series of 41 photographs. Unfortunately, the source of these unreferenced images (a souvenir booklet published at the hospital) does not appear in the bibliography. Although the introduction mentions the role of the fort as an artillery training base during the 1920s and 1930s, no images of 155mm howitzers or gun crews once prevalent at the fort appear. Entirely absent is the brief use of the fort by the 125th Observation Squadron of the Iowa Air National Guard after its federal mobilization in September 1941. Lastly, only a few minor references interpret the fort’s more recent use by Army and Navy Reserve units up to the present day. As the first photo history of century-old Fort Des Moines No. 3, the book provides uneven and sparse coverage but successfully delivers a photographically rich overview of WAAC/WAC activities during World War II.


Reviewer Linda Van Ingen is associate professor of history at the University of Nebraska, Kearney. Her research and writing have focused on gender, race, and electoral politics in the twentieth century.

What began as a research project on Iowa Republican Mary Louise Smith has become, in the capable hands of Catherine Rymph, an impressive national history of Republican women from the 1920s to the 1980s. Rymph combed dozens of public and private archival collections to bring local perspectives into what is largely a history of the National Federation of Republican Women. Iowa women play large and small parts in this study. Smith is important for her role in the 1970s as a Republican feminist and the first woman chair of the Republican National Committee (RNC), and she is an interesting contrast to the conservative model of Republican womanhood presented by Phyllis Schlafly. Iowa club leader Ella Taylor of Tama County and Dorothy Christiansen of the Iowa Council of Republican Women are examples of diverse political styles in the 1930s and 1950s. While val-