

# CAMP MABRY

The fifth in a series of history articles about our great neighborhood.  
by **Trey McWhorter**

Camp Mabry is the third-oldest active military installation in Texas, behind Fort Sam Houston and Fort Bliss. It was named for Brigadier General Woodford H. Mabry, the Adjutant General of Texas when the camp was founded.<sup>1</sup>

Its original 85-acre site three miles northwest of downtown Austin was donated by the city to the state in 1892. In 1909 the camp grew with the addition of 200 acres of land purchased by the federal government for use in training the state national guard. Other land gifts brought the camp to its present size of around 375 acres by 1911.<sup>2</sup>

The first constructions at the camp were grandstands and a mess shed. In 1915 an arsenal became the first permanent structure built onsite, allowing military equipment and weapons to be moved out of storage in the capitol building. During World War I the U.S. Army used the camp as a training site and built several barracks and administration buildings.



Grand Stand at Camp Mabry in Austin, Texas], photograph, 1897; (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph124042/ml/1/>); crediting Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

As development began to occur around the military base in the mid 1940's, the base had to modify operations somewhat. It was noted in a November 1946 article that one of the projects at Camp Mabry was “remodeling of the rifle range... to provide a safety range for large bore rifle fire, which was recently discontinued because of the development of Highland Park West.”<sup>5</sup>

And if you've never visited... you should! The Texas Military Forces Museum at Camp Mabry is awesome. Drive in through the main entrance on 35th, show your ID and the guard can point you to the museum. It's free!

But Camp Mabry served a role in non-military capacities as well. In August, 1923 construction of a half-mile track, “the first race track that has been seen in Austin in more than 10 years”<sup>3</sup>, it was said at the time, was completed in preparation for the Texas State Exposition. In 1927, it was reported to have had “the best horse-racing card Austin has ever had – and among the best the Lone Star state has to offer” in conjunction with the Texas State Exposition that year.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, rodeos, polo matches and even football games were hosted on the fields at Camp Mabry in the late 20's and early 30's, with reference to equestrian events as late as the 1970's. However, even by the mid-1950's, the number of events had declined along with public interest.



PICA 16347 Austin History Center, Austin Public Library  
[Camp Mabry Gate], photograph, 1918; (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph124391/ml/1/>); crediting Austin History Center, Austin Public Library.

<sup>1</sup>A brief history of Camp Mabry”. Texas Military Forces Museum.

<sup>2</sup>Smyrl, Vivian Elizabeth. “CAMP MABRY”. Handbook of Texas Online.

<sup>3</sup>AUSTIN RACE TRACK WILL BE COMPLETED BEFORE NEXT WEEK: Camp Mabry Half ...The Austin Statesman (1921-1973); Aug 30, 1923; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Austin American Statesman, pg. 5

<sup>4</sup>Greatest Racing Meet Austin Ever Had Opens at Camp Mabry Oct. 4: The Austin American (1914-1973); Oct 2, 1927; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Austin American Statesman, pg. B1

<sup>5</sup>Mabry Being Readied For Guard Units; The Austin Statesman (1921-1973); Nov 25, 1946; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Austin American Statesman, pg. 5