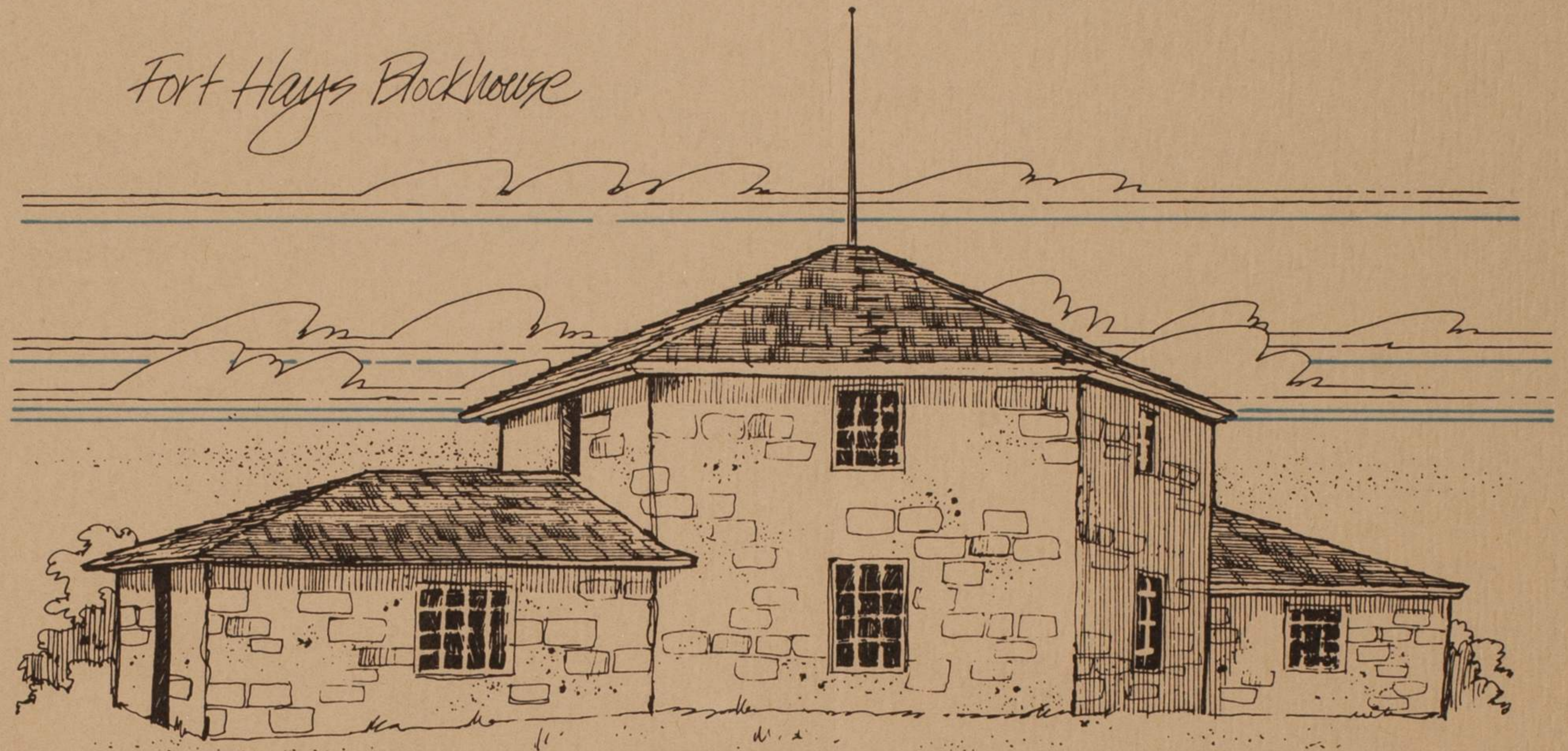


Shortly after the Civil War, railroad builders and settlers began pushing into central and western Kansas with increasing intensity, provoking resistance from the region's Indian inhabitants. To provide protection, the federal government established military posts including Fort Dodge on the Santa Fe Trail and Fort Fletcher, later Fort Hays, on the Smoky Hill Trail, a stagecoach road to Denver that later was the approximate route of the Kansas Pacific Railroad.

Railroad survey crews were just arriving in the vicinity when Fort Fletcher, named for Missouri Gov. Thomas C. Fletcher, was located 14 miles southeast of present Hays on October 11, 1865. A year later the name was changed to honor Gen. Alexander Hays, who had been killed in 1864 at the Battle of the Wilderness.

After the fort was virtually destroyed in a flash flood in 1867, it was relocated to a site now just south of the city of Hays. Unlike the typical military posts of the earlier eastern frontier, there was no stockade or fortification wall. Instead, officers' quarters, barracks, headquarters, storehouses, and other buildings grouped around a parade ground constituted the outline of the new Fort Hays.

A stone blockhouse, hexagonal in shape with two wings extending north and south, was equipped with rifle slits, but the fort was never attacked, and the building was actually used as a post headquarters and adjutant's quarters. The guardhouse, also built of stone, furnished quarters for the officer of the



*Fort Hays Blockhouse*

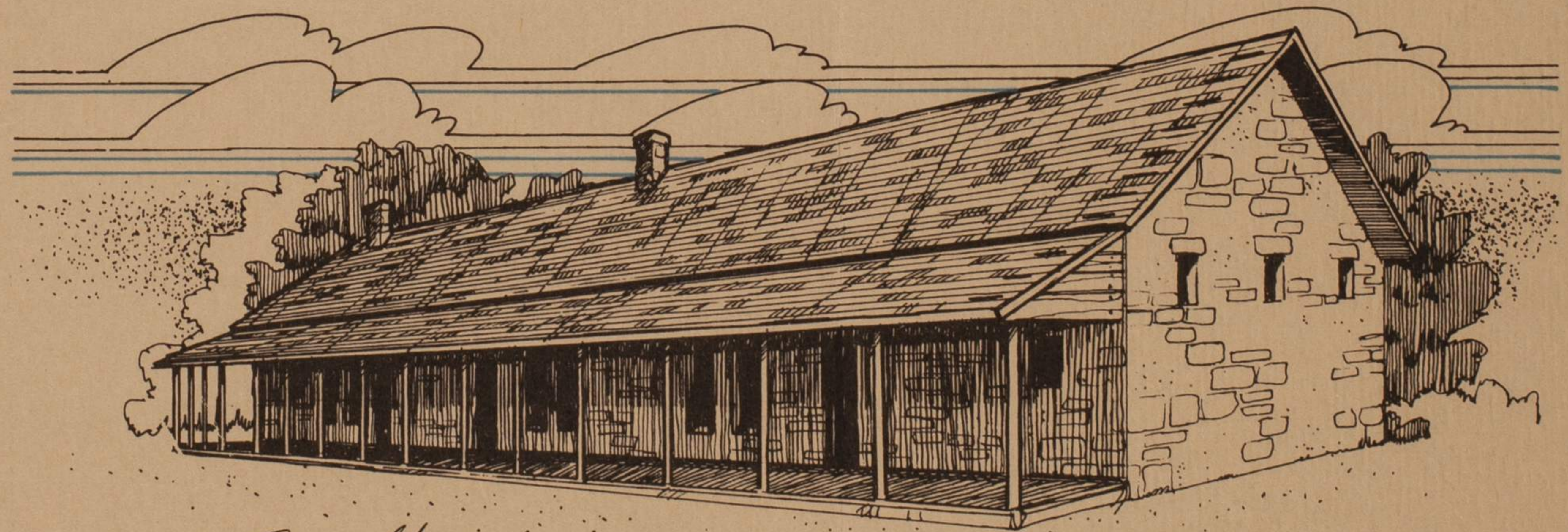
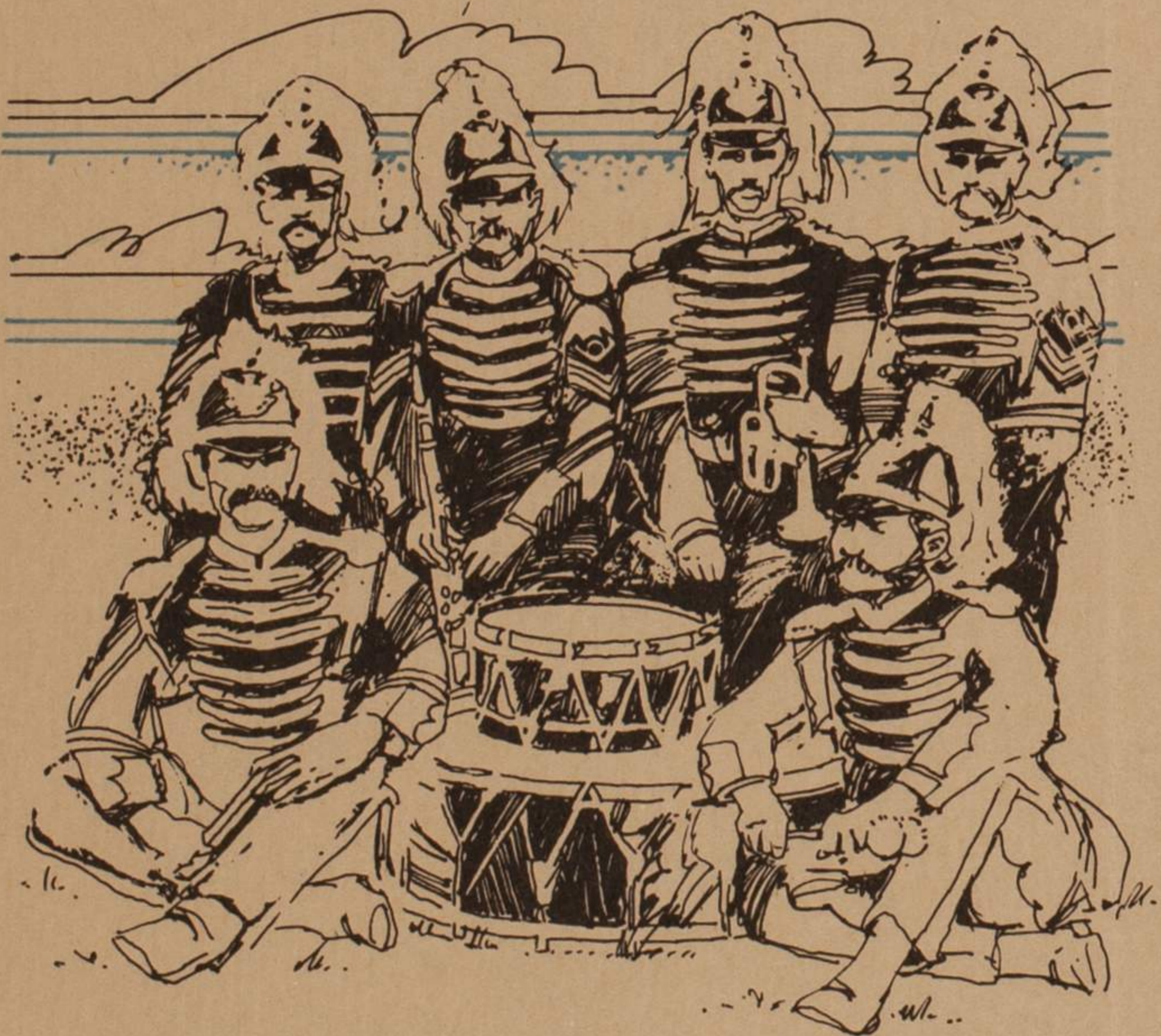
guard, a guard room, and a prison room with three cells. Except for a small bakery, all other buildings—officers' quarters, married enlisted men's quarters, barracks, hospital, storehouses, and other house-keeping buildings—were of frame construction.

Garrison strength at Fort Hays normally averaged three companies, or about 150 men. George A. Custer, Marcus A. Reno, George A. Forsyth, and Philip H. Sheridan were among the noted military figures associated with it.

In 1867 Hays City was staked out a mile to the east,

and with the arrival of the railroad in October the fortunes of Hays City and Fort Hays became almost inseparable. The military post was turned into a quartermaster depot which supplied other forts throughout the West and Southwest. Such an operation required a large number of civilian as well as military personnel, and Hays City consequently experienced a rapid and turbulent development.

In those days Hays was a wild town, filled with saloons and dance halls. The legendary James B. "Wild Bill" Hickok served as county sheriff for a few months



*Guardhouse*