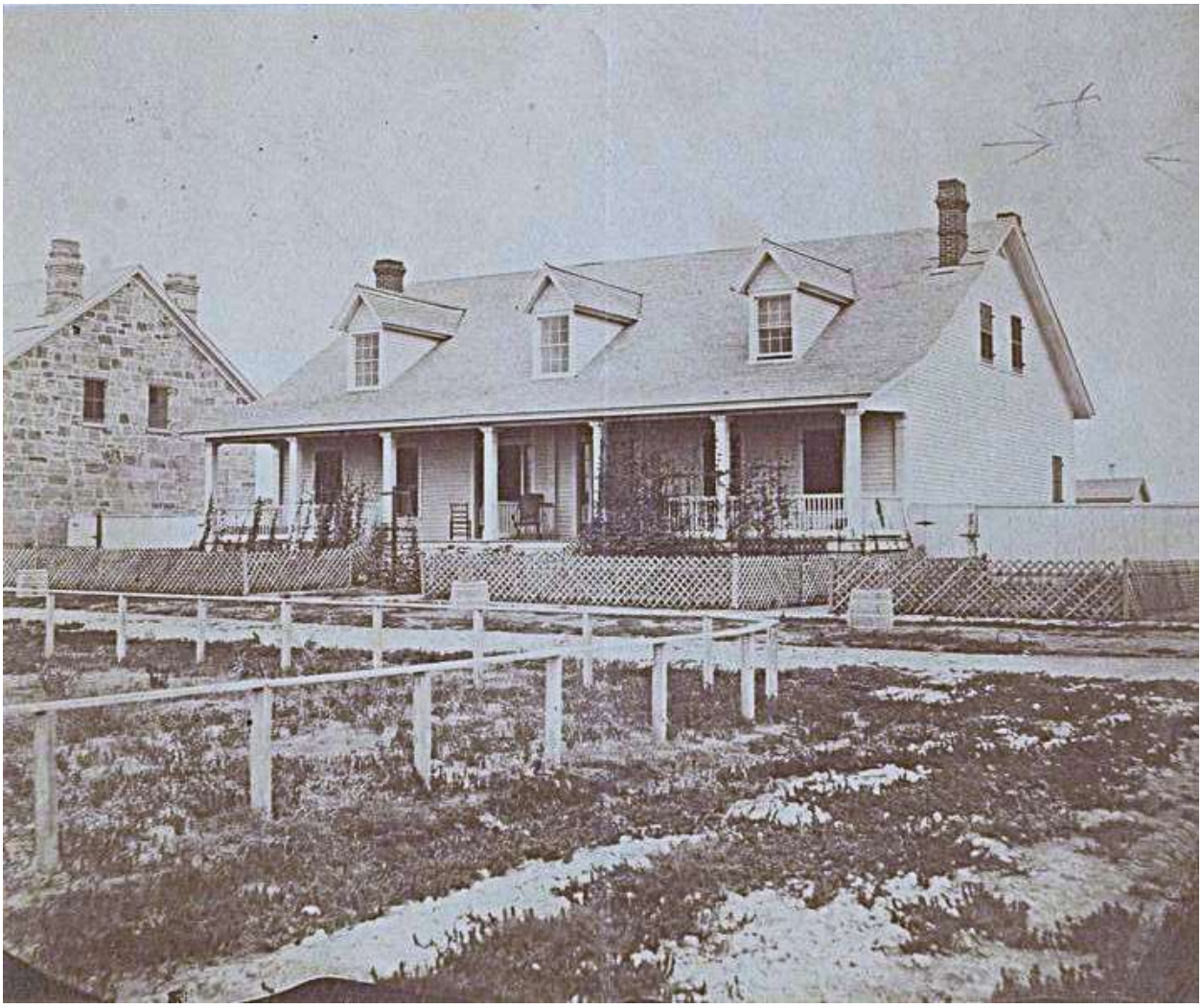
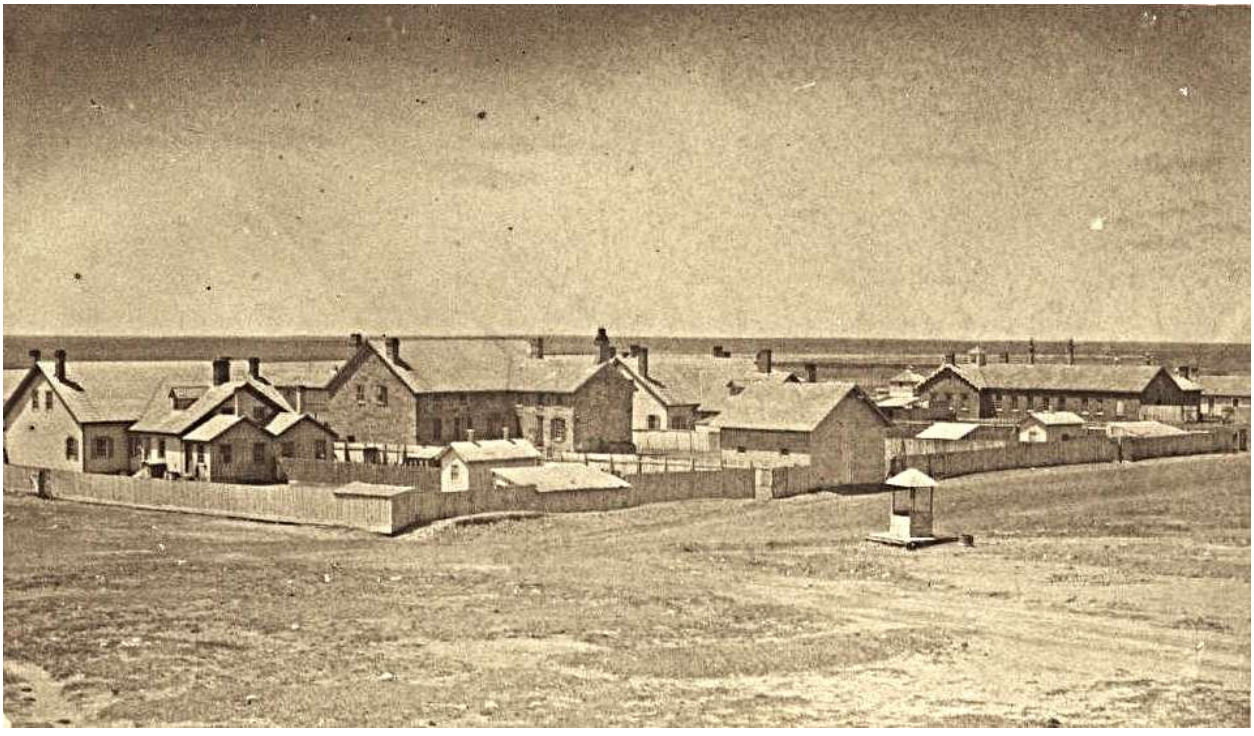
HB2781 Proponent Written-only Testimony
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
March 18, 2026

The Kansas Historical Society enthusiastically supports this bill to transfer the historic Junior Officers' Quarters from the Kansas Office of Veterans Services to our agency as the culmination of over a decade of efforts by local citizens and interested parties to preserve this unique historic property.

Among the most important Kansas frontier outposts, Fort Dodge was established in 1865 to keep the peace between traders on the Santa Fe Trail, settlers moving West, and Native American tribes. The fort closed in 1882, and ownership of the fort was transferred to the State of Kansas in 1889 for use as a soldiers' home, providing care and residence for retired Kansas veterans. After years of vacancy and deterioration, the Junior Officers' Quarters building was placed on the demolition list in 2017. In 2019, KSHS provided a Historic Preservation Fund grant to the Ford County Historical Society to prepare a condition assessment report and alternative use feasibility study. Recent collaboration between the Kansas Office of Veterans Services, the Ford County Historical Society, local representatives, and our agency has resulted in a plan to preserve the building without negatively impacting the mission of the Kansas Soldiers' Home. After the building is transferred to KSHS, we will immediately stabilize the building's foundation and porch utilizing $50,000 in federal funds while simultaneously working with the Ford County Historical Society to procure the remaining funds needed to completely restore the building and install museum exhibits (approximately $1 million total).

Once completed, the property will become the first State Historic Site in southwest Kansas and will be operated under a partnership agreement with the Ford County Historical Society. KSHS will develop engaging education exhibits and programming for student and adult audiences. This site will allow KSHS to better tell the rich history of the Santa Fe Trail and the role Fort Dodge played in the development of southwest Kansas. From Shawnee Indian Mission near the Missouri border, to Kaw Mission and Last Chance Store in Council Grove, to Pawnee Rock in Barton County, and now Fort Dodge in Ford County, visitors will be able to experience Santa Fe Trail history in authentic buildings that existed during the years the trail was in active operation. This project will result in a great asset to the State of Kansas.

Thank you for your consideration.

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