Special Files of the
Office of Indian Affairs
1807-1904
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SPECIAL FILES OF THE OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
1807-1904

On the 85 rolls of this microfilm publication are reproduced the Special Files of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1807-1904.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, usually known as the Office of Indian Affairs until 1947, was established within the War Department in 1824. From 1789 to 1824 Indian affairs were administered in the Office of the Secretary of War. In 1849 the Office of Indian Affairs was transferred to the Department of the Interior, where it has remained.

The Special Files consist of correspondence, reports, accounts, affidavits, and other records that were brought together for easier reference. The records relate principally to claims and investigations but include some other subjects. The claims are those of traders for goods furnished to Indians or the Government, of transportation contractors for shipping goods, of attorneys for legal fees, of other persons for services to Indians or the Government, of both Indians and whites for losses from depredations, of Indians for losses resulting from their removal from the East, and of persons claiming the right to share in tribal benefits. Many of the claims were submitted in conformance with provisions of treaties between Indian tribes and the United States. The investigations, other than those of claims, were principally of the conduct of employees of the Office. There is an index of names and subjects following this introduction.

Most of the records in the series were withdrawn from the general incoming correspondence of the Office. But some records of special commissions transmitted to the Office when their work was completed also are included. There are some copies of letters sent by the Office and some records withdrawn from a general series of claims begun in 1877 and from a series of authorities from the Secretary of the Interior begun in 1880.

The series contains 303 Special Files, numbered in order; but the records formerly in some of these files are missing. Most of the files relate to one subject, a few
to several subjects. The dates are those of the records in the files, usually the date of receipt in the Office or by a commission. The actual dates of individual documents, especially those submitted as evidence for claims, may be much earlier.

The records within each file are arranged most often either by assigned claim numbers or in the usual order for incoming correspondence of the Office. Through 1880 incoming correspondence was arranged by year, thereunder alphabetically by initial letter of surname or official position of writer, and thereunder chronologically by date of receipt (by date of letter until 1836). For the years 1881-1907 incoming correspondence was arranged chronologically in order of receipt. Claims and authorities were also arranged in this order. Copies of letters sent were sometimes filed with pertinent letters received and at times at the end of files. Unusual arrangements of files are noted in the contents of rolls.

Many documents are filed as enclosures. Sometimes, especially in the later years, letters received were referred to another office (most often the Office of the Secretary of the Interior) and later returned. Usually such letters were returned to their original places in the files, but sometimes they were filed as enclosures to letters returning them.

Often several Special Files contain closely related records; and again one set of claims is divided among several Special Files. Many cross-references to related Special Files and to other records are inserted at the beginning of files.

The records here reproduced are part of the records in the National Archives designated as Record Group 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Related records in the same record group that have been microfilmed include Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-80 (Microcopy 234); Registers of Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-80 (Microcopy 18); Letters Sent by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-61 (Microcopy 21); and Report Books of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1838-85 (Microcopy 348).
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