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**Headquarters Records
Fort Gibson, Indian Territory
1830-1857**



NATIONAL ARCHIVES TRUST FUND BOARD
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON: 1987

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Records of U.S. Army

Continental Commands, 1821-1920

Record Group 393

HEADQUARTERS RECORDS
FORT GIBSON, INDIAN TERRITORY
1830-1757

Headquarters records of Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, 1830-57, are reproduced on the six rolls of this microfilm publication. The records consist of letters sent and received, orders and memorandum orders issued, orders received, and proceedings of the post council of administration. These constitute all of the extant post headquarters records for the 1830-57 period except for guard reports, 1840-57, and a register of accounts, 1846-57, which have been omitted from this microfilm publication because large parts of both series are illegible. The records are part of Records of U.S. Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Record Group (RG) 393.

Background

Fort Gibson was originally established as Cantonment Gibson in April 1824 to facilitate U.S. government policies of westward expansion and Indian removal. An act of May 26, 1824 (4 Stat. 40), extended the western boundary of Arkansas approximately 40 miles. In anticipation of this act, the army thought it necessary to establish a garrison beyond Fort Smith, then the westernmost military post. By this time, many eastern Indians had relocated west of the Mississippi River. Beginning with President Thomas Jefferson, the government had espoused and encouraged the resettlement of eastern tribes to permanent homes in the West. After the passage of the Indian removal act of May 28, 1830 (4 Stat. 411), it forcibly removed and resettled them on lands west of the incorporated territories, an area that subsequently became known as Indian Territory. The tribes most affected were the Osage, Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole, all of whom were relocated on land near Fort Gibson in what is now eastern Oklahoma.

On March 6, 1824, Western Department Order 20 directed the garrison of Fort Smith to move farther up the Arkansas River and "establish itself in a new position, at or near the mouth of the Verdigris river." Accordingly, Col. Matthew Arbuckle and Companies B, C, G, H, and K abandoned Fort Smith and by April 22 had established the new post on the left bank of the Neosho (or Grand) River, 2½ miles above its confluence with the Arkansas River. War Department General Order 84 of November 20, 1824, named the post Cantonment Gibson, presumably in honor of

Col. George Gibson, Commissary General of Subsistence, whose department was given responsibility for the Indian resettlement. On February 8, 1832, Cantonment Gibson was officially designated Fort Gibson in accordance with a War Department order of that date.

From Fort Gibson the army sought to mediate differences and maintain peace among the resettled Indian tribes. In the early years of the fort's existence, much of the garrison's time was occupied in dealing with strife between the Osage and Cherokee and enforcing laws designed to prevent the introduction and sale of liquor in Indian Territory. In subsequent years, the army had to deal with problems resulting from factions and rivalries among the Cherokee.

Between 1832 and 1837, the army mounted from Fort Gibson a concerted effort to achieve permanent pacification of all of the tribes in Indian Territory. One such move was the Leavenworth-Dodge expedition, which was launched in June 1834. Led by Bvt. Brig. Gen. Henry Dodge, the effort culminated in the first formal negotiations among the Comanche and Wichita Indians and representatives of the U.S. government. Other moves toward peace with the Indians were accomplished by treaties, such as the one negotiated with the Osage at Fort Gibson on January 5, 1835, and the one of August 24, 1835, signed at Camp Holmes by most of the major Plains tribes of the area. Colonel Arbuckle, the post commander at Fort Gibson participated extensively in the negotiations that led to the Camp Holmes treaty.

The unhealthful location of Fort Gibson, resulting in a high death rate from sickness, led the army to abandon the fort on September 9, 1857, in accordance with War Department Special Order 114 of August 6, 1857. During the Civil War the post was briefly occupied by Confederate forces, and in April 1863 it was reoccupied by units of the Union Army under the command of Maj. Gen. James G. Blunt. On February 18, 1866, the volunteer troops stationed there were relieved by a detachment of the 19th U.S. Infantry. General Order 22, Department of Missouri, dated September 30, 1871, directed that the post be broken up but provided for the retention of part of the Fort Gibson military reservation as a quartermaster depot and supply center for Fort Sill.

The post was reoccupied on July 31, 1872, by a detachment of 10th U.S. Cavalry under Col. Benjamin H. Grierson and was garrisoned until October 1, 1890, when War Department General Order 88 directed its abandonment by Company H, 6th U.S. Infantry. By authority of an Executive order dated February 2, 1891, the President ordered the military reservation turned over to the Interior Department for disposition, and in October 1891 the reservation was transferred to the Cherokee Nation.

Records Description

Letters Sent

The letters in the four volumes of letters sent, January 5, 1842-September 9, 1857, are arranged chronologically. There are no letters for the period May 24, 1849-May 14, 1851. Letters were dispatched to the Adjutant General, the Quartermaster General, the Commissary General of Subsistence, the Surgeon General, and the Chief of Ordnance; superior military field commands, such as the Western Division, the Department of the West, and the 2d and 7th Military Departments; officers at other military posts; Indian agents; U.S. district attorneys and marshals in Arkansas; Indian chiefs; and private citizens. The letters sent relate to such matters as relations between soldiers and Indians and between military officers and Indian agents; conflicts between tribes, violations of trading and liquor laws, and other crimes committed by whites and Indians; white children taken prisoner by Indians; and black slaves and free blacks residing among the Indians. Other letters concern military personnel and related army administrative matters, such as desertions, courts-martial, muster rolls, post returns, and notifications of promotion, assignment, disability, and discharge. The first volume contains a partial descriptive list of letters for the period January 5, 1842-September 25, 1846.

Letters Sent and Received Relating to Indian Affairs

There is a single volume of letters sent and received relating to Indian affairs, April 30, 1840-August 27, 1851. The letters are arranged chronologically, with letters sent interspersed with letters received. Correspondents include the Secretary of War, the Adjutant General, the Quartermaster General, Indian superintendents and agents, and chiefs of the Cherokee and Creek Nations. Letters relate to the sale and manumission of Indian slaves, the status of Seminole Negroes captured in Florida, requests from whites and free blacks to work and reside among the Cherokee, the expulsion of unauthorized persons from the Indian country, and other subjects. In addition to letters, this volume includes copies of receipts and agreements for the sale of slaves, passes allowing entry and residence in Indian country, and freedom papers for Seminole Negroes. The volume contains an incomplete descriptive contents list covering only the first 11 letters sent.

Letters Sent and Received Relating to Ordnance

Letters sent and received relating to ordnance, December 2, 1830-July 2, 1857, in the single volume are arranged chronologically. The letters sent are interspersed with the letters received. Correspondents include the chief of Ordnance; commanders of the St. Louis, Little Rock, and Baton Rouge arsenals; officers at other military posts; and officials at the Treasury Department. The letters relate to requisitions for ordnance stores, accounts of ordnance on hand, and receipts for the return of ordnance used by the post garrison.

Letters Received

The letters received, February 13, 1833-June 13, 1857, are arranged chronologically by date written. Correspondents include the Secretary of War; the Adjutant General; the Commanding General of the Army; the Quartermaster General; military officers from superior territorial commands, Fort Gibson, other military posts and in the field; the Bureau of Indian Affairs; Indian agents, marshals, and other U.S. government officials; Indian chiefs, particularly John Ross of the Cherokee; and white citizens. In addition to incoming letters, there are drafts and copies of letters sent by the post commander; copies of orders; proceedings of meetings and courts-martial; transcripts of statements made by Indians and whites; and copies of treaties, agreements, resolutions, and council proceedings pertaining to or adopted by Indian tribes.

A number of the letters relate to the military administration of the post and to routine personnel matters involving assignments, promotions, desertions, courts-martial, and requests for leave. A more substantial body of letters concerns relations with neighboring Indian tribes. Among the subjects dealt with are the administration of Indian affairs by Indian superintendents and agents and the resulting friction with army officers engaged in the same activities; procurement of rations and supplies for the tribes; attempts to prevent the illegal introduction of liquor among the Indians; intertribal and intratribal conflicts, especially conflicts within the various factions of the Cherokee tribe; intertribal and intratribal councils and meetings, such as the council held in June 1839 to unite the Cherokee who had recently immigrated from the East with those Cherokee who had been living in Indian Territory for some time; intrusions of Indians and white settlers on Indian lands; crimes committed by and against Indians; requests for military aid in making arrests; the status of slaves belonging to whites and Indians; and elections and other political activities among the Cherokee.

Orders Issued

The six volumes of orders issued, January 11, 1842-September 4, 1857, are arranged chronologically. The orders are arranged chronologically and thereunder are numbered sequentially by year. The orders are directives to the post garrison relating to the administration of the post, duty assignments, training of soldiers, desertions, arrests, and courts-martial. A few of the orders prescribe procedures for protecting Indians and slaves. The first and fourth volumes contain partial descriptive lists of orders for the periods April 25, 1842-April 29, 1845, and May 3, 1845-June 6, 1848, respectively.

Memorandum Orders Issued

The contents of the single volume of memorandum orders issued, May 29, 1855-June 18, 1857, are arranged chronologically by date of issuance. The memorandums relate primarily to routine post administrative matters affecting enlisted personnel, including duty assignments, funerals, drills, inspections, and regulations.

Orders Received

The orders in five volumes of orders received, June 8, 1839-November 18, 1856, are arranged chronologically. They contain copies (frequently abstracts) of general orders, special orders, orders, circulars, memorandums, and some directives in the form of letters received at the post. Most of the orders were issued by the Adjutant General's Office, Headquarters of the Army, 2d and 7th Military Departments, Department of the West, and Western Division. Many of the orders relate directly or indirectly to Fort Gibson and deal with such matters as War Department Indian policies; administrative procedures; troop assignments and movements; courts-martial; and appointments, assignments, promotions, leaves of absence, and resignations of military personnel.

Proceedings of the Post Council of Administration

The contents of the single volume of proceedings of the post council of administration, May 8, 1845-June 16, 1857, are arranged chronologically. The proceedings reflect the work of the post council in determining the types and prices of goods sold by the post sutler; auditing accounts of the post treasurer, sutler, bakery, school, and library; managing the post fund; providing funds for the purchase of library books and periodicals, school equipment, and garden supplies; and arranging for the appointment and payment of post chaplains, librarians, and school teachers. Other activities discussed in

the proceedings include payments due to laundresses and sutlers from deceased soldiers and deserters and the handling of personal effects of soldiers who died on duty. Included with the proceedings are statements of the various post accounts and lists of goods sold by the sutler.

Related Records

Also in RG 393 are records (12 linear feet) of the subsequent garrisons at Fort Gibson, 1865-90, which include letters, endorsements, and telegrams sent; registers of letters received; letters received; post issuances, and records of the post chaplain, quartermaster, and recruiting officer. There are also records of the various army territorial commands that had jurisdiction over Fort Gibson, including the Western Division and the Department of the West. Related records of other territorial commands available as National Archives microfilm publications are M1302, Records of Headquarters, Army of the Southwestern Frontier, and Headquarters, Second and Seventh Military Departments, 1835-1853, and M1475, Letters and Other Records Received by the Eastern Division Pertaining to Cherokee Removal, 1836-1838.

The following records that relate to Fort Gibson are among Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, RG 94: the 1824-57 monthly post returns of Fort Gibson have been microfilmed on rolls 404 and 405 of M617, Returns from U.S. Military Posts 1800-1916. M567, Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General (Main Series), 1822-1860, contains some letters that relate to Fort Gibson. A collection of papers of Maj. Gen. Thomas S. Jesup contains correspondence for the period 1836-38 relating to the removal of Creek and Seminole Indians and their emigration to the West.

Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, RG 92, include a consolidated correspondence file consisting of 3 linear feet of records pertaining largely to construction and maintenance of buildings and to various supplies, equipment, and subsistence stores at the fort.

Many records series relating to Fort Gibson and to the Indians under its control are also to be found among Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75. One series has been microfilmed as Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-80, M234.

Fred J. Romanski wrote these introductory remarks and prepared the records for filming.

CONTENTS

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Dates</u>
1	<u>Letters Sent</u>	
	Volume 1	Jan. 5, 1842-May 23, 1849
	Volume 2	May 15, 1851-Sept. 6, 1854
	Volume 3	Sept. 9, 1854-Sept. 13, 1856
	Volume 4	Oct. 10, 1856-Sept. 9, 1857
	<u>Letters Sent and Received Relating to Indian Affairs</u>	Apr. 30, 1840-Aug. 27, 1851
	<u>Letters Sent and Received Relating to Ordinance</u>	Dec. 2, 1830-July 2, 1857
2	<u>Letters Received</u>	Feb. 13, 1833-Dec. 26, 1842
3	<u>Letters Received</u>	Jan. 3, 1843-Dec. 29, 1845
4	<u>Letters Received</u>	Jan. 3, 1846-June 13, 1857
5	<u>Orders Issued</u>	
	Volume 1	Jan. 11, 1842-July 30, 1843
	Volume 2	Aug. 1, 1843-Apr. 29, 1845
	Volume 3	May 3, 1845-Feb. 27, 1848
	Volume 4	Feb. 28, 1848-June 30, 1850
	Volume 5	July 3, 1850-Dec. 30, 1856
	Volume 6	Jan. 6-Sept. 4, 1857
	<u>Memorandum Orders Issued</u>	May 29, 1855-June 18, 1857

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Dates</u>
6	<u>Orders Received</u>	
	Volume 1	June 8, 1839-Dec. 12, 1842
	Volume 2	Dec. 14, 1842-Apr. 13, 1844
	Volume 3	Apr. 16, 1844-May 29, 1846
	Volume 4	June 4, 1846-July 28, 1848
	Volume 5	July 28, 1848-Nov. 18, 1856
	<u>Proceedings of the Post Council of Administration</u>	May 8, 1845-June 16, 1857