



An Indispensable Point

A Historic Resource Study of the Vancouver
Ordnance Depot and Arsenal, 1849- 1882

Gregory P. Shine

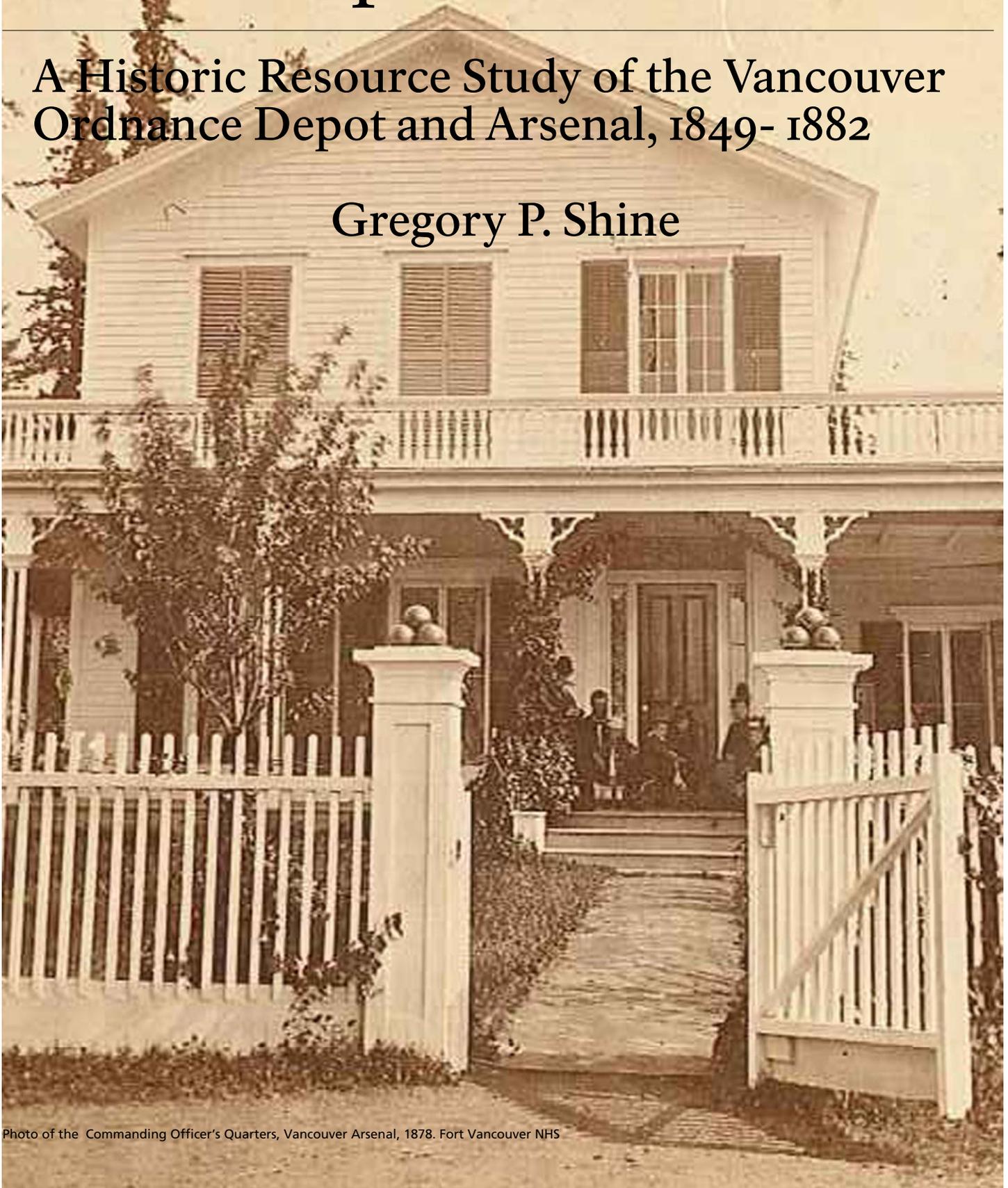


Photo of the Commanding Officer's Quarters, Vancouver Arsenal, 1878. Fort Vancouver NHS

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Northwest Cultural Resources Institute Report #6

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Project Scope and Methods

This document provides information about the significance and historical development of the Vancouver Ordnance Depot, later known as the Vancouver Arsenal. It was completed in conjunction with a report that details the results of a three year archaeological survey of much of the boundaries of the Vancouver Arsenal that are now occupied by a National Park Service Visitor Center. It is a historically based component of the cultural resources studies that were necessary to be in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) for the proposed rehabilitation of the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site (FOVA) Visitor Center into the Vancouver National Historic Reserve (VNHR) Visitor Center. As such, this document serves to present the greater historical background of the Vancouver Ordnance Depot/Vancouver Arsenal, and assists in presenting the significance of the archaeological deposits associated with the Arsenal.

As there have been no previous historical studies of the Vancouver Arsenal, and as the topic has been nearly absent in previous historical works on the U.S. Army in the Pacific Northwest, this document serves as the baseline historical documentation of the post. The presentation of these data helps to better determine the eligibility of this historical component for the National Register of Historic Places within the larger complex of the Vancouver National Historic Reserve National Historic District. This document presents not only the post's historical development, its commanding officers, and sequence of basic events, but it also focuses particularly on building construction – including designs, dates, costs, materials, methods, and repairs – as well as the armament, equipment and stores held onsite throughout the post's existence.

With a goal of informing future site interpretation, it includes information about the post's personnel, the post's compelling stories, connections to interpretive themes established in the Historic Reserve's Long Range Interpretive Plan (2004) and general historical context.

This report is organized in three sections. Part I is a brief, general introduction to ordnance and the U.S. Army's Ordnance Department. Part II outlines the post's historical development and is crafted in a traditional chronological narrative format. A special emphasis is placed on the post's early, formative years. Part III is an appendix that includes images, maps, inventories, newspaper articles, and other supplementary documents, including GIS maps showing the post over time, a detailed accounting of the files accessed in the National Archives main building in Washington, D.C., and suggestions for future research.

This study draws from both primary and secondary source information but is based principally on the former. Unfortunately, no post files for the Vancouver Arsenal (beyond standard post returns) are known by the National Archives and Records Administration to exist in their collections. Thus, records available for other posts, such as orders, architectural plans, maps, contracts, payrolls, deeds and surveys; registers and inventories of ordnance and ordnance stores issued and received; reports relating to ordnance production, fabrication, modification, experimentation, and inspection; reports of work performed; records of civilian employees; blueprints of ordnance and ordnance equipment; administrative and office circulars and memorandums; and annual inspection reports are not available for the Vancouver Arsenal except for the rare few instances when they were erroneously filed elsewhere.

Luckily, some correspondence between the post's commanders and the Ordnance Department in Washington, D.C. does exist, and it provides the foundation of this study. On rare occasions, these letters included reference to or included copies of some of the records available for other posts. Maps, plans, and photos provide additional information, and secondary sources help provide additional historical context.

The reliance of this study on the correspondence between post and department headquarters has its limitations, and the author acknowledges the tendency for this study to reflect, as a result, a more traditional personality- based (and officer class- based, at that) perspective. In addition, due to the scope of this project (as well as the resources, time and funding available) the author acknowledges several important areas in need of future analysis. It is the author's hope that further research in the holdings of the National Archives will lead to additional investigation and analysis of these areas.

To help direct this research, an appendix has been added that details the textual files reviewed by the author in January 2008. In addition, the author recommends that any future investigation consider exploring the RG 393 holdings for the Department of Oregon (1858- 61), Division and Department of the Pacific (1848- 66), and Division of the Pacific (1869- 91), as they may contain additional sources and analysis that can build upon this initial study.

Introduction

To all but a few today, the Vancouver Ordnance Depot, later known as the Vancouver Arsenal, is largely unknown. No buildings exist. Few landscape traces, photos, maps, or other documents survive. A very limited number of archaeological clues have thus far been uncovered. Extant secondary sources largely ignore it. In his seminal 1997 multi-volume work *Round Ball to Rimfire: A history of Civil War Small Arms Ammunition*, Dean S. Thomas notes, in reference to the Vancouver Arsenal, that “there are no records of this facility extant at the National Archives.”¹

Despite this obscurity, the post and its personnel played a major role in the military history of the Pacific Northwest – one that contributes to an understanding of the broad patterns of our nation’s history. As an independent command reporting directly to the War Department’s Chief of Ordnance in Washington, D.C., the post was one of only little more than a dozen in the nation. It was commanded by some of the army’s best and brightest, all of whom continued distinguished, though often diverse, careers after their sojourn at the post. It supplied ordnance and stores for all of the major – and most of the minor – forts, camps, battles, campaigns, and conflagrations in the Pacific Northwest, and many in California and other western lands. It also represented the front line for many of the land title issues that defined the acres comprising the military reserve at Vancouver (encompassing the ordnance depot/arsenal, the garrison of the U.S. Army’s Fort Vancouver, and the Quartermaster’s Department’s Vancouver Depot). Joshua W. Sill, the namesake for the U.S. Army’s Fort Sill, recognized this importance, aptly calling the site “an indispensable point for furnishing extensive and rapid supplies of stores to all the surrounding region.”²

The post also represented untapped potential. Had not ongoing land claim issues with the Hudson’s Bay Company, the St. James Mission, and American immigrants existed, the army would most likely not have limited construction within the Ordnance Reserve to temporary structures only. The solid brick buildings originally designed, planned, and purchased but never constructed on the site – and more typical of other arsenal facilities – would have been some of the first and most prominent in the region. As such, they might still have been preserved today. This concept of *what might have been* was to haunt the post’s personnel as well. Many of the army’s up and coming officers - its *wunderkinder*

¹ Dean S. Thomas, *Round Ball to Rimfire: A History of Civil War Small Arms Ammunition, Part One* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1997), 65.

² H. K. Craig, Washington, D.C., to Joshua W. Sill, Vancouver Ordnance Depot, W.T., 9 December 1858, Page 399, Volume 18, E- 6, Letters, Telegrams, Endorsements Sent to Ordnance Officers, General Records, Correspondence, 1794- 1941, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, Record Group 156, National Archives, Washington, D.C. [hereafter NARA OCO Letters Sent].

– often found their efforts at the post come to frustration rather than fruition. Personal and professional disagreements with the adjacent post and department staff, a harsh climate, and differences of economy were all exacerbated by a distant and often indifferent chain of command. John A. Kress may have summed up this frustration when he recalled that he felt, as the arsenal’s commander, “as independent as a hog on ice.”³

This phrase also sums up the post and its relation to its much larger and prominent neighbors, the garrison of the U.S. Army’s Fort Vancouver and the Headquarters of the Department of the Columbia, housed on the military reserve for all but thirteen years of the post’s existence. A palpable tension existed with the latter; the commanding officer of the Vancouver Ordnance Depot/Arsenal was frequently tapped to be the department’s ordnance officer, and thus subject to the direction of the department commander. Under the best conditions, it often pulled a commanding officer in two distinct directions. When abused, or used as a tool by a department’s commanding general to control a relatively autonomous post, it could prove disastrous to the command and commander. On at least one occasion, this relationship became untenable, resulting in dozens of letters, an arrest, a court martial for the commander, and delay in essential construction for the post.

The ability to succeed while balancing often contradictory directives and needs from local, distant, and often competing sources represented the most important skill a young ordnance commander could possess. While the frustration of many of its commanding officers is manifest through the thousands of lines of their correspondence, it is also evident, in retrospect, that the post served as a proving ground that tempered commanders for a career navigating the army’s bureaucratic and oligarchic network of influence, power, and patronage.

The Vancouver Ordnance Depot/Arsenal was destined –for more than twenty years – to be a temporary post, but only in a temporal sense. Its structures were rough, wooden ones, built *not* to last – built to provide basic protection for the public property and its stewards from theft, misuse, and the region’s damp, cold winters and hot, dry summers. To its commanders, despite its early appellation it was an *arsenal*, and they commanded it as if it were; abiding by the same directives and regulations as the nation’s other more established, permanent facilities. This accounts for much of the arsenal’s significance, and the fact that its commanders were able to conduct – with a modicum of success – the War Department’s business from a post harboring only temporary facilities is a testament to their skill and dedication.

³ John A. Kress, *Memoirs of Brigadier General John A. Kress* (Merion, PA, 1928), 36- 7.

Part I

Ordnance Organization and Function

To the U.S. Army, the terms *ordnance* and *ordnance stores* included a myriad of related arms, ammunition, and martial equipment. In 1852, they were officially defined as:

all cannon, howitzers, mortars, cannon balls, shot, and shells, for the land service; all gun carriages, mortar beds, caissons, and travelling forges, with their equipments; and all other apparatus and machines required for the service and manoeuvres of artillery, in garrisons, at sieges, or in the field; together with the materials for their construction, preservation, and repair. Also, all small arms, side arms, and accoutrements, for the artillery, cavalry, infantry, and riflemen; all ammunition, for ordnance and small arms; and all stores of expenditure, for the service of the various arms; materials for the construction and repair of Ordnance buildings; utensils and stores for laboratories, including standard weights, gauges, and measures; and all other tools and utensils required for the performance of Ordnance duty. The ordinary articles of camp equipage and pioneers' tools, such as axes, spades, shovels, mattocks, &c., are not embraced as Ordnance supplies.⁴

Overall management and accountability for these items fell to the army's Ordnance Department. Reporting to the Secretary of War since 1815, the department was tasked with managing the public armories and arsenals and also arming and equipping militias. In addition, it was the department's mission to:

enlist artisans and laborers; to direct the inspection and proof of all cannon and small arms; to direct the construction of gun carriages, equipments, implements, and ammunition; to make estimates and contracts for, and purchases of ordnance supplies and stores, and to issue them to the army; to exact from armories and arsenals quarterly returns of property and to receive from all responsible officers reports of

⁴ Ordnance Department, United States Army, *Regulations for the Government of the Ordnance Department* (Washington, D.C.: Gideon & Co., 1852), 3.

damages to ordnance material; to establish ordnance depots; to prepare regulations for the government of the Ordnance Department and forms or returns and reports.⁵

The Ordnance Department had seen its ups and downs by the mid nineteenth century; its officer corps – known as the Ordnance Corps – had been decimated in the army reorganization of 1821, when its officers were reassigned, *in toto*, to line positions in the artillery (see plate 1). Until reorganization in 1832 reestablished the corps and help further differentiate it from the artillery, line officers from the artillery served in detail assignments to the ordnance department. By 1838, the department’s staff had grown to include a commanding colonel (later known as the chief of ordnance), a lieutenant colonel, four majors, ten captains, and twelve lieutenants – all selected from the artillery, but no longer in a detail or acting capacity.

With dedicated staff came additional developments that led to the further professionalization of the department. In 1841, an Ordnance Board was formed, and the inventories, improvements, and experiments facilitated by it led not only to the systematizing of army ordnance but also to innovations in metal and gunpowder that, in turn, led to more powerful weaponry. In relation to this study, the invention – and subsequent adoption of – the sub-caliber self expanding bullet following trials at the Harpers Ferry and Springfield Armories in the early 1850s played a monumental role. This new bullet made smoothbore weaponry obsolete, and led to the domination of the rifle musket and the rifle.⁶

The Ordnance Department classified its facilities by function; by 1855, there were four distinct classes encompassing twenty different sites throughout the nation. Those of the first class were considered arsenals of construction. They included the Watervliet (New York), Allegheny (Pennsylvania), St. Louis (Missouri), and Benecia (California) Arsenals. Second class arsenals, described as arsenals of repair, included the Watertown (Massachusetts), Frankford (Pennsylvania), Fort Monroe (Virginia), North Carolina, and Baton Rouge (Louisiana) Arsenals. The third class encompassed arsenals of deposit. These were primarily repositories for ordnance and accompanying stores, and included the Kennebec (Maine), Champlain (Vermont), Detroit (Michigan), New York, Charleston (South Carolina), Augusta (Georgia), Mount Vernon (Alabama), and Little Rock (Arkansas) Arsenals. Another classification was that of armory, which included the Springfield (Massachusetts) and Harpers Ferry (Virginia) Armories.⁷ All of

⁵ C.E. Dutton, “The Ordnance Department,” *The Army of the United States: Historical Sketches of Staff and Line With Portraits of Generals-in-Chief*, T.F. Rodenbough & William L. Haskins, eds. (New York: Maynard, Merrill & Co., 1896), 126.

⁶ *Ibid*, 129- 31.

⁷ Thomas, 13.

these facilities were commanded by an officer of the Ordnance Department, who reported directly to the department's commanding officer.

Part II

The Army Arrives: Advent of Army Ordnance Responsibilities, 1849-1853

On May 13, 1849, the steamer *Massachusetts* arrived at the wharf at the British Hudson's Bay Company's (HBC) Fort Vancouver, bringing soldiers from Companies L and M of the First U.S. Artillery Regiment with designs to establish posts in the newly American territory. The subsequent salute fired by the ship presumably also introduced the army's ordnance to the region, though ordnance had long been present at the site.

As early as 1832, the HBC had, within the walls of the stockade, established a fireproof powder magazine of brick and/or stone. Small arms were an essential component of the fur trade, and powder was indispensable to their operation. The HBC traded in both, and Fort Vancouver's role as the central depot for company operations in the Oregon Country meant that it was a central repository for both. The HBC's ordnance was by no means limited to small arms; in 1826, the fort held two carronades, two 18- pounder guns with carriages, four 6- pounder guns with carriages, four 4- pounder guns with carriages, seven iron swivel guns, one iron coehorn mortar, and two brass ½- pounders in its inventory.⁸ By 1845 a cannon- laden bastion towered over the stockade's northwest corner, ensuring safety from any ill- intentioned American immigrants arriving each year in exponential numbers.

In addition, the coastal trade was centered at Fort Vancouver for many years, and it is possible that the ships may have been supplied by it with shot and powder necessary to support their trading activities. However, by 1849 the HBC had relocated the main departmental depot (as well as other functions) to Fort Victoria, and Fort Vancouver had gradually declined in prominence. Nevertheless, an important legacy was established by the HBC – the legacy of the geographic location serving as a regional center for ordnance and stores. This – and other organizational practices, including utilization of the name “Fort Vancouver” – was soon to be mirrored by the U.S. Army.⁹

⁸ John A. Hussey, *The History of Fort Vancouver and its Physical Structure* (Portland, OR: Washington State Historical Society, 1957), 51 n. 22.

⁹ For more information regarding the HBC's Powder Magazine, see Hussey, 184, and Thomas and Hibbs, *Kanaka Village Report, Vol. 2: Operation 60*, 635- 94. The army post had several names over the years, including Fort Vancouver (1849- 50), Columbia Barracks (1850- 53), Fort Vancouver (1853- 79), and Vancouver Barracks (1879- present).

Early Ordnance Planning

Just over a month after the *Massachusetts'* arrival, Rufus Ingalls, an officer assigned as assistant regimental quartermaster, rented two schoolhouses constructed by the HBC between 1844 and 1846. The westernmost of these, a floored, ten room building, was soon to house Company L, and the easternmost, an unfloored building of two room construction served as the army's commissary and the quartermaster's supply storehouse.

Within months of arrival, Captain and Brevet Major J.S. Hatheway, commanding the new army post, received orders from Washington D.C. relating to ordnance. General Orders 30, dated May 16, 1849 and received at the post on February 15, 1850, directed ““the establishment of an Ordnance Depot on the Columbia River, Oregon.””¹⁰ The exact location of this depot remains unclear, though it is highly likely that it was to be associated with the post.

Whether any progress was made on this order is also unclear, as the artillery units soon relocated to Astoria, turning over the post to Colonel William Wing Loring and a regiment of mounted riflemen who had relocated to Vancouver after wintering in Oregon City. Loring also served in the capacity of military department commander and soon oversaw the establishment of a four square mile military reserve. Loring actually sought to establish military reservations in several areas, including Vancouver, Astoria, The Dalles, and Milwaukie. At the latter, he desired an arsenal or ordnance depot. Since the prospective location was part of an established land claim by William Meek, it caused much consternation – as did the general presence of federal troops. Samuel R. Thurston, a Democrat and Oregon Territory's delegate to Congress, wrote to Meek that he was “fighting hard” to save Meek's land claim, which he did. The arsenal was not established, and Thurston's efforts led to the removal from Oregon Territory of the regiment of mounted riflemen in lieu of empowering the governor to call out volunteers when necessary. Volunteers still needed a cache of arms and ammunition, though, so the conceptual support for an arsenal continued.¹¹

To the south, in California, the army encountered a different response from citizens. In 1849, landowners in Benicia, California, donated 345 acres for the establishment of a military reservation. Subsequently, the army established the Benicia Barracks post as well as a quartermaster's depot and, in 1850, an ordnance

¹⁰ United States Army, Post Returns, Vancouver Barracks, February 1850, National Archives Microfilm Publication M617, Roll 1315, National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. [hereafter NARA Microfilm].

¹¹ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume 31: History of Washington, Idaho and Montana, 1845- 1889* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1890), 92, 134, & 225.

depot. By 1852, the latter was upgraded to an Arsenal of Construction with the responsibility for supplying ordnance and stores up and down the Pacific Coast.¹² Any facility at Vancouver, by design, would be intimately connected to the larger Benicia post.

By June of 1851, the mounted riflemen had departed the Pacific Northwest, leaving the post to a much smaller detachment of seventeen artillery officers and soldiers. That month, First Lieutenant James Theodore Talbot assumed temporary command of the post known as Columbia Barracks (see Plate 2). A native of Kentucky and son of Senator Isham Talbot, he had accompanied John Charles Fremont on his second and third expeditions to the west prior to his arrival on the *Massachusetts* in 1849. Talbot's assignment to Oregon in 1849 initially brought dismay, and he described it in pessimistic tones, as "a sort of terra incognita or a genteel Botany Bay for Army Officers."¹³ In addition to this temporary command, Talbot also served in a longer capacity as the "Acting Ordnance Officer" for the Eleventh Military Department – the first time such a position was documented at the post.¹⁴ His journal and letters briefly refer to these duties, including the compiling of ordnance returns and shipping ordnance to Benicia.¹⁵

Discussion on the location of a depot in the region continued, with the Headquarters of the Pacific Division sending at least two letters to the post in 1851 and 1852 relating to "a contemplated reserve for an Ordnance Depot on the Willamette River."¹⁶ In 1853, the Ordnance Department submitted to the War Department a "special estimate, amounting to \$42,189, for a powder magazine, Store-house and quarters on the Site reserved for an Arsenal in Oregon Territory," but department commander Henry K. Craig lamented that he could not account for its omission from any of the appropriation acts by early 1853.¹⁷ In his capacity, Talbot may have been involved in these discussions.

¹² "Benicia Arsenal: History of Site Operations," from www.benicia-arsenal.net/htrw/profile/history/index.htm, viewed 3 February 2008; Thomas, 48.

¹³ Robert V. Hine & Savoie Lottinville, *Soldier in the West: Letters of Theodore Talbot During His Services in California, Mexico, and Oregon, 1845- 53* (Norman, OK: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 137. By the time he was preparing for departure in October 1852, Talbot may have had a change of heart. He wrote that he was "rather sorry to leave Vancouver as it was our first resting place is a very handsome spot and central in position.... I do not know of any positive disagreeabilities of the post itself and the chief objection to a residence there is the isolation," quoted in Hine & Lottinville, 177.

¹⁴ Post Returns, June 1852, NARA Microfilm

¹⁵ Charles H. Carey, ed., *The Journals of Theodore Talbot, 1843 and 1849- 52* (Portland, OR: Metropolitan Press, 1931), 110- 1; Hine & Lottinville, 158.

¹⁶ Post Returns, December 1851 & April 1852, NARA Microfilm. The text of the letters is not included, but a short abstract summarizes the letters' content.

¹⁷ Craig, to C.P. Stone, Benicia Arsenal, 22 March 1853, Page 408, Volume 13, NARA OCO Letters Sent.

Talbot served as the department's acting ordnance officer until September 1852, when the Fourth Infantry regiment arrived at the post. Talbot relinquished his commissary responsibilities to another first lieutenant – Ulysses S. Grant. The record is unclear, however, if Grant assumed the duty of acting ordnance officer; subsequent returns list Grant as “Regimental Quartermaster” and make no reference – with Grant, Talbot, or any other officer – to the role.¹⁸ Talbot would depart the site on February 15, 1853, destined to directly witness the start of the Civil War. He would not live to see its end.¹⁹

¹⁸ Post Returns, September & October 1853, NARA Microfilm.

¹⁹ After stints at various forts in Virginia, Maryland, and Florida, 1861 found Talbot at South Carolina's Fort Sumter. He survived the siege, only to die the following year in Washington D.C. from a chronic lung ailment. He was thirty- seven.

The Ordnance Department Takes Over: Establishment of the Vancouver Ordnance Depot, 1853- 1858

By February 1853, management of army ordnance in the Pacific Northwest changed. Rather than “officers of the line in charge of the [ordnance] stores” as had been the case with Talbot, the Ordnance Department appointed an agent who was listed with five civil employees at the fort.²⁰ He promptly resigned. A joint recommendation endorsed by the post’s fifteen officers, dated March 11, recommended that Theodore John Eckerson “be hereby appointed to fill the situation made vacant by the resignation of G.C. Bomford, late Acting Military Store- Keeper at this place.”²¹ In April, the title Ordnance Agent is again listed, and documents suggest that Eckerson became this agent in charge on April 1, 1853 (see Plate 3).²²

Eckerson was well prepared for such a responsibility. Fifteen years earlier, at age seventeen, he joined the infantry and fought in the Florida campaigns of 1841 and 1842. For the next six years, the New York native served throughout the south and saw action at several major battles of the Mexican War before joining the First U.S. Artillery in the fall of 1848. Attached to Company L, Eckerson sailed on the *Massachusetts* and arrived at Fort Vancouver with Talbot and the first U.S. troops in May of 1849. Eckerson’s wife, Elizabeth, soon became pregnant and gave birth to a son in April 1850 at the post. By the day after Christmas, Eckerson and his wife were mourning the child’s death, and Eckerson voiced to his grief through a poignantly poetic elegy published in the *Oregon Spectator*.²³ In happier times, the same newspaper would announce, less than three months later, the birth of the Eckersons’ second child.²⁴ Eckerson would publish several poems in the *Spectator*, leading it to comment that “as a writer of verse [he] is entitled to some distinction.”²⁵ In an 1852 letter to its editor, he deftly opposed the use of his name in endorsing politics, demonstrating a sparkling wit in the process.²⁶

By this time, Eckerson had risen from the rank of private to first sergeant with this artillery unit, and in April 1853 he began a new role as the agent of the U.S. Ordnance Department in charge of the Ordnance Depot, Washington Territory.

²⁰ Theodore J. Eckerson, Ordnance Depot, Vancouver, W.T., to Craig, 4 October 1854. Number 55, E- 21 Letters Received 1812- 1894, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, Record Group 156, National Archives, Washington, D.C. [hereafter NARA OCO Letters received].

²¹ Copy of Joint Recommendation of the Officers at Columbia Barracks. Theodore J. Eckerson, MSS 887, Folder 2, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.

²² William H. Powell, *Powell’s Records of Living Officers of the United States Army* (Philadelphia: L.R. Hamersly & Co., 1890), 195.

²³ *Oregon Spectator*, 16 January 1851.

²⁴ *Oregon Spectator*, 03 April 1851.

²⁵ *Oregon Spectator*, 02 September 1853. See also *Oregon Spectator* 30 January 1851 and 22 July 1852.

²⁶ *Oregon Spectator*, 02 March 1852

In September, the *Spectator* noted that he was an applicant for appointment as military storekeeper, calling him “a man of superior qualifications.”²⁷ A veteran with a distinguished service record, a talented writer, and someone active in the community (especially the local Catholic Church), and endorsed by the press, Eckerson received the appointment and became the military storekeeper in charge of the Vancouver Ordnance Depot on September 13, 1853, drawing a salary of \$1,250 per annum.²⁸

Legislative Progress

In its first session in 1854, Washington Territory’s legislature passed several joint resolutions, one of which urged territorial governor Isaac Ingalls Stevens to “use his influence with the administration” to effect the building of an arsenal.²⁹ Stevens, although well connected to the Pierce Administration, lacked the political clout to forward such issues alone, and forged a strategic alliance with fellow Democrat Joseph Lane, then Oregon’s delegate. One result proved fortuitous to an arsenal; Stevens gained Lane’s support that Washington Territory would be the preferred location for an arsenal if Congress supported only one in the Pacific Northwest.³⁰

By this time, Captain T. L. Brent was laboring to improve the buildings at the army’s facility now named Fort Vancouver. Described as “comfortable and cozy” – the latter, perhaps, was the operative word – the army’s needs exceeded its building space, requiring the rental of several buildings from the HBC. The westernmost of the two school houses that the army had rented from the HBC in 1849 still stood in 1854, and the army rented it at a rate of \$45 per month and used it as a hospital (see Plate 4). Ironically, this wasn’t the only use of the building. “A portion of the building...was also used as an ordnance storehouse,” recalled the army’s Benjamin Alvord, and an army inspector noted that “the Hospital is a very inferior building...and storeroom for ordnance also in same,” during his visit in 1854.³¹ The building seemed to have made a poor ordnance storeroom, though;

²⁷ *Oregon Spectator*, 2 September 1852

²⁸ Powell, *Ibid.* For rate of pay, see Eckerson to Craig, 06 May 1856, Number 52, NARA OCO Letters Received.

²⁹ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume 31: History of Washington, Idaho and Montana, 1845- 1889* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1890), 84- 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

³¹ *Evidence for the United States in the Matter of the Claim of the Hudson’s Bay Company, Pending Before the British and American Joint Commission, for the Final Settlement of the Claims of the Hudson’s Bay and Puget’s Sound Agricultural Companies* (Washington, D.C.: McGill & Witerow, 1867), 352; Patricia C. Erigero, *Cultural Landscape Report, Volume II: Fort Vancouver National Historic Site* (Seattle: National Park Service, 1992), 234 & 243.

Ingalls complained that it was “not fit for any use if another and proper one could be put up.”³²

Interestingly, ordnance was not wholly relegated to rented structures. By 1854, a log magazine was one of the newly constructed buildings to the north of the hospital/ordnance storehouse. Living quarters for Eckerson, however, were not available; he was “compelled to hire quarters” for himself in the town of Vancouver near the depot.³³

Eckerson’s quarterly reports seem to have been lost, but several of his letters provide insight into the ordnance and stores he managed. In October 1854, he reported several items condemned as unserviceable, including infantry cartridge boxes and plates; infantry waist belt plates; bayonet scabbards; cap pouches; gun slings; rifle cartridge boxes, waist belts and plates; rifle target cartridges; and 6-pounder fuzes.³⁴ The following April, he acknowledged the receipt of 4,000 musket cartridges.³⁵ As an employee of the Ordnance Department, Eckerson also received instructions from Brevet Captain C.P. Stone, the commanding officer at Benicia Arsenal, who also had oversight of ordnance depots in San Diego and San Francisco, California.³⁶

Growing Regional Demands for Ordnance

The importance of a regional facility for ordnance storage in the Pacific Northwest grew with each passing year. Settlers continued to homestead in traditional Indian lands throughout Oregon and Washington Territories, especially after the creation of the latter in 1853. As a result of this increased immigration and its resulting displacement of native peoples, conflicts between settlers and Indians broke out throughout the region – in southern Oregon in 1853, the Yakima Country and Walla Walla in 1854, and Puget Sound and the Colville area in 1855. All required military response, often from volunteers as well as regular army units.

The outfitting of volunteers with arms and ammunition presented a particular challenge, as federal and state arsenals or ordnance depots traditionally provided this service to state volunteers and militias upon request. This held true in the territories as well; in August 1853 Eckerson “responded very promptly” to the call

³² Erigero, 234.

³³ Eckerson to Craig, 5 April 1856, Number 43, NARA OCO Letters Received.

³⁴ Eckerson to Craig, 4 October 1854, Number 55, NARA OCO Letters Received. Eckerson noted that the rifle target cartridges and 6-pounder fuses had been rendered unserviceable “by being wet in transportation with the Rifle Regiment, on its march to Oregon in 1849.”

³⁵ Eckerson to Craig, 9 April 1855, Number 32, NARA OCO Letters Received.

³⁶ Craig to Eckerson, 12 January 1854, Page 241, Volume 14, NARA OCO Letters Sent.

of George Curry, the acting governor of Oregon Territory, and provided 60 small arms and 4,500 rounds of ammunition for punitive action in the Rogue River area of southern Oregon.³⁷ In 1855, during what he described as an “extraordinary state of Indian hostilities commenced in Oregon and Washington Territories,” Eckerson again responded to requisitions from Curry – one that included 146 muskets, 150 rifles, 3 Colt revolvers, and 9000 cartridges for response in the Yakima country, and another for 80 muskets, 8,000 rounds of ammunition, and 10,000 percussion caps needed in southern Oregon – and provided 203 muskets to Charles H. Mason, acting governor of Washington Territory.³⁸ To meet these needs, though, Eckerson had to make his own requisition (to the Benicia Arsenal for 500 rifles and 250 muskets) since the arms on hand at the depot “would not suffice for the arming of more than two companies.”³⁹

Added to the needs of militias and volunteers were the increasing demands of the army. In 1853, Jefferson Davis became the new Secretary of War, and his priorities included the expanding of the peacetime army and the upgrading of its equipment. By 1855, due in part to Davis’ encouragement, several new regiments had been authorized by Congress. In addition, the army embraced technological expansion, adopting new rifled muskets in place of old smoothbores, and federal armories stopped the production of the latter in favor of producing the newer arms or converting the old to the newer technology.⁴⁰ The resulting effect on arsenals and ordnance depots was significant; stockpiles of arms, ammunition, and accoutrements now considered obsolete needed to be converted or replaced, and new arms needed to be shipped, inventoried, and distributed.

The army’s expansion was not limited to personnel and technology; in the west – and in Oregon and Washington Territory especially – the army initiated new forts on some of the area’s most valuable lands. With posts established at Fort Vancouver as well as Fort Steilacoom in Washington Territory and Fort Orford, Fort Lane, and Fort Dalles in Oregon Territory – an arsenal seemed a dire necessity. It soon became a political reality –in concept.

³⁷ *Oregon Spectator*, 26 August 1853.

³⁸ Eckerson to Craig, 28 October 1858, Number 89, NARA OCO Letters Received; Eckerson to Craig, 1 December 1855, Number 4, NARA OCO Letters Received. For complete itemized listings, in tabular format, of the arms and supplies Eckerson provided to Oregon and Washington Territories, see Letter 36, Eckerson to Craig, 7 March 1856, NARA OCO Letters Received.

³⁹ Eckerson to Craig, Washington, D.C., 10 Jan 1856, Number 22, NARA OCO Letters Received. Eckerson incurred the displeasure of his superiors, for the volunteers for whom Governor Curry requisitioned the arms refused to be regularly mustered into the service. As such, they were not eligible to receive arms.

⁴⁰ Richard W. Stewart, ed., *American Military History, Volume 1: The United States Army and the Forging of a Nation* (Washington D.C.: Center for Military History, United States Army, 2005), 192- 3.

Congress Authorizes an Appropriation

On August 30, 1856, the Thirty-fourth Congress passed, in its second session, “An Act making Appropriations for the support of the Army.” In addition to financing general army operations and several specific projects, the bill included funding “for the erection of suitable magazines and other arsenal buildings in Texas, in California, in Washington or Oregon Territory, and in New Mexico, two hundred and thirty thousand one hundred and fifty-seven dollars.”⁴¹ Subsequent army documents list the date of this Act as the establishment of Vancouver Arsenal, although it would be several years before it received this official title.⁴²

Ostensibly, it was this funding appropriated in 1856 that led Craig in Washington, D.C. to initiate construction orders for Eckerson the following December:

It is proposed to erect at Vancouver a Store House and Magazine for an Ordnance Depot – both buildings of Brick – the Store House to be two stories high and 120 feet long by 45 feet wide, the Magazine to be arched with brick and to be 43 feet by 22 feet wide. I send you Bills of the materials that will be required in the construction of these Buildings, all of which will have to be purchased in your neighborhood, except the metal parts. The roofs of both buildings will be of tin, and the door and window caps and sills of cast iron, which materials will be sent to you from the Atlantic, as well as Bolts for Roof Trussings, Nails, Copper Gutters &c. Before commencing the erection of the Buildings, it will be necessary to have an Estimate of the cost of the materials mentioned in the enclosed Bills, such as Lumber, Stone, Brick Lime; and also the cost of Labor in the erection of the two...whereupon you will be furnished with full instructions for the work.⁴³

⁴¹ “*Public Acts, Etc., of the Thirty-fourth Congress of the United States, Passed at the Second Session, which was begun and held at the City of Washington, in the District of Columbia, on Thursday, the 21st day of August, 1856, and ended on Saturday, the 30th day of August, 1856,*” Appendix to the *Congressional Globe*, 57. Available online at

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llcg&fileName=041/llcg041.db&recNum=792>.

⁴² For example, see “Vancouver Barracks, Washington,” U.S. National Archives, RG 92 Reservations 1888- 1911, P- 2, Box 2, NM- fi E.1214

⁴³ Craig to Eckerson, 4 December 1857, Page 347, Volume 17, NARA OCO Letters Sent.

Twelve days later, after having received information allowing him to “make an approximate estimate of the cost of the materials for the storehouse and magazine,” Craig followed up on his previous post:

I send, herewith, drawings of these buildings, and authorize you to procure the materials to be purchased in your neighborhood, and to go on with the erection of the buildings... These buildings will be located by you on the site recommended by Lieut. Colonel Ripley, and they will supersede the necessity of the temporary shelter suggested in your letter.⁴⁴

Craig also noted that a master builder would probably be sent out from the East Coast to supervise building construction. In response, Eckerson provided a detailed estimate in January 1858. Although the estimate itself has yet to be located, in the cover letter he did add several items to Craig’s list, “for the foundations underground to the depth of three feet; for such heavy structures I have, from the nature of the ground, on due consideration thought it necessary.”⁴⁵

The following day, he wrote to Craig again, assuring him that he would “proceed at once to procure the necessary materials for the work.”⁴⁶ He did. Two days later, in several advertisements published in the Portland *Morning Oregonian* newspaper Eckerson announced that proposals were being duly “received... for building materials for the use of the U.S. Arsenal” in Vancouver (see Plate 5). The prospective materials included 400,000 bricks, 450 “lineal feet of Rock dressed, viz bedded, jointed and edged for laying”, 300 cubic yards of stone for foundations, 200 barrels of lime, and 60 barrels of cement. He specifically required that the stone and rock be “of the best quality to be approved by competent judges” while also noting his desire to receive at least half of the materials by March 31, 1858.⁴⁷

Eckerson wrote that he planned to commence construction “immediately at the close of the rainy season” and requisitioned important metal parts required for construction (see Appendix 1). He estimated that the project would cost \$14,900, with materials amounting to \$11,000 and labor costs of \$3,900.⁴⁸ By the end of February, he had received bids and awarded contracts. Sumner Barker received the contract for brick, Roberts and Shartle for dressed granite, George N. Nye for rough stone, and Camp and Company for lime and cement. Presumably, the

⁴⁴ Craig to Eckerson, 16 December 1857, Page 364- 5, Volume 17, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁴⁵ Eckerson to Craig, 19 January 1858, Number 15, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁴⁶ Eckerson to Craig, 20 January 1858, Number 16, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁴⁷ Portland *Morning Oregonian*, 6 Feb 1858.

⁴⁸ Eckerson to Craig, 13 February 1858, Number 28, NARA OCO Letters Received.

planned location for the buildings was “on the site recommended by Lt. Col. Ripley,” described by Eckerson as 1300 yards from the government wharf.⁴⁹

By the end of June, he reported that all of the materials for which contracts were made had been delivered except the stone and brick; ninety yards of stone, intended for foundations, was on hand by this date. Barker, who received the contract for supplying the brick, had established a brickyard “at great expense” and hired a crew of eight men who had been working for more than three months producing 200,000 bricks.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Eckerson to Craig, 23 February 1858, Number 29, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁵⁰ Eckerson to Joshua Woodrow Sill, 22 June 1858, Number 278, NARA OCO Letters Received.

Sill Assumes Command: June 1858-July 1859

As the project moved forward, First Lieutenant Joshua Woodrow Sill assumed command of the department's Ordnance Depot on June 22, 1858 (see Plate 6). (Eckerson remained briefly attached in his status as military storekeeper, but soon received a sought-after transfer – but to Benicia Arsenal rather than a post on the Atlantic coast as requested.) In a department full of bright minds, Sill was one of the brightest. He had been nominated for promotion to the rank of first lieutenant in the Ordnance Department just a few short weeks after Congress' appropriation in 1856.⁵¹ The son of a prominent Midwestern attorney, Sill was born on December 6, 1831 in Chillicothe, Ohio.⁵² "Sill was a practical man," noted one acquaintance, "of great resources, energy, and courage, small of stature, and compactly built. He was beloved and admired in the army for his great courtesy, kindness, and good sense."⁵³ Graduating third in his class at West Point in 1853, Sill was appointed to New York's Watervliet Arsenal. After a respite where he returned to West Point to teach, a special assignment found him at the Allegheny Arsenal, conducting gun metal experiments with Captain Thomas Rodman. Duty then pointed him west, briefly at Benicia, before heading to Oregon "to supervise the construction of magazines and fortifications."⁵⁴ More explicitly, General Harney recollected that Sill "had been ordered on the specific duty of erecting an arsenal at Fort Vancouver."⁵⁵

Arriving first in San Francisco at the end of May, Sill learned that the "building operations were for the present suspended at Vancouver."⁵⁶ He arrived at Vancouver on June 21, where he received orders from the Ordnance Office not to "conclude any contracts or enter into any arrangements for other than the same may have so far progressed that they *cannot* be stopped or modified so as to await the settlement of the question of title and location of the Arsenal."⁵⁷ This must have come as a great shock to him; it did to Eckerson, who noted to Sill that he did not have "even the most remote idea that any delay would occur."⁵⁸

⁵¹ "Promotions," *Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States of America, 1855- 1858*, July 15, 1856. Document available online at: <http://memory.loc.gov>.

⁵² Whitelaw Reid, *Ohio in the War: Her Statesmen, Her Generals, and Soldiers. Volume I: History of the State During the War, and the Lives of Her Generals* (Cincinnati: Moore, Wiltach, & Baldwin, 1868), 919- 20.

⁵³ William Franklin Gore Shanks, *Personal Recollections of Distinguished Generals* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1866), 137.

⁵⁴ Reid, *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ L.U. Reavis, *The Life and Military Services of Gen. William Selby Harney* (St. Louis: Bryan, Brand, & Co., 1878), 293.

⁵⁶ Sill to Craig, 15 June 1858, Number 256, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁵⁷ Sill to Craig, 23 June 1858, Number 278, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

This presented several challenges to Sill's mission. As all of the building materials had been fully delivered except for the brick and stone, Eckerson had two outstanding contracts remaining. Sill reported that the suspension of construction "may injuriously affect the Contractors unless relieved by partial payment," especially since there was, at the time, no demand for bricks or brick buildings in the area. Second was the matter of the building materials already procured; lumber and lime, for instance, would be difficult to preserve – from the weather as well as theft – during the cessation of construction. Thirdly, he realized that he had few personnel on hand. Without any dedicated staff – such as armorers, artificers, or guards – the depot had been relying upon a rotation of soldiers detailed from units in garrison at the fort. Sill found these soldiers "not satisfactory" and he requested a small detachment to meet the depot's growing needs. Sill believed that a "detachment of six men, two of whom may be armorers, could be usefully employed at this Arsenal."⁵⁹

Ongoing Land Claim Issues

By autumn of 1858, word of the cessation of construction had reached Congress; in November, the Ordnance Office reported to the U.S. House of Representatives that "the site selected for a depot at Fort Vancouver having been found to be interfered with by the possessory claims of British subjects, the project of building there has been abandoned for the present by your authority."⁶⁰ Throughout the ensuing decade and beyond, this was an issue that would arrest any plans for permanent arsenal structures and impede the construction of temporary ones.

Under the treaty of 1846, the HBC held possessory rights to land and property they held south of the forty- ninth parallel, including the area later comprising the army's military reservation at Fort Vancouver. Misunderstanding of the treaty led many to believe that it was not just the HBC's license of exclusive British trade that expired in 1859, but also these possessory rights to more than 8,960 acres of land and property. This and other factors led to an influx of American settlers – so many that, by 1853, much of the land the HBC claimed had been, in turn, claimed by these settlers. Much of the HBC- claimed land, that is, except for most of the acreage that fell within the boundaries of the military reservation. That same year, these boundaries changed. In reaction to the desires of settlers and the

⁵⁹ Sill to Craig, 23 June 1858, Number 278, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁶⁰ "Report of the Secretary of War, Section 24," *Executive Documents Printed by Order of the House of Representatives During the Second Session of the Thirty- fifth Congress, 1858- '59* (Washington: James B. Steadman, 1859), 1308- 9

growing local government, the boundaries of the military reserve were reduced by Congress from four square miles to 640 acres.⁶¹

Within this parcel, both the U.S. Army and HBC believed that claims of any other interest were excluded. However, that did not stop settlers from squatting on several areas of the reservation, adding tension to an increasingly souring relationship between the HBC and the army. To further complicate matters, the Catholic Church claimed a 640 acre parcel surrounding their St. James Mission, just north of the HBC's fort and including a majority of the reduced military reserve. They reasoned that the church had served local Indians prior to 1848 and thus qualified to title of the land under Oregon law.⁶²

It was the complexity of the claims of four major stakeholders – Great Britain (as represented by the HBC, the United States (as represented by the U.S. Army), settlers claiming land under the Donation Law, and the Catholic Church that precluded any permanent arsenal construction and caused what Colonel B.L.E. Bonneville termed “a constant source of irritation.”⁶³ This multifaceted irritation was not one to be quickly resolved; it was not until 1869 that Britain and the United States settled the HBC's claim, and the issue with the Catholic Church would not be determined until 1905, when the church abandoned its efforts.⁶⁴

An Operating Depot

Despite this ongoing setback, the depot was actively functioning as a repository for ordnance and ordnance stores. By November 1858, the commander of the Benicia Armory reported that “large supplies of ammunition and other ordnance stores [have been] forwarded to the Vancouver depot.”⁶⁵ These supplies were housed in the Ordnance Storehouse – the “old log building” rented from the HBC at a rate of \$40 per month.⁶⁶ Upon review of extant maps (see Plate 7), it is likely that this is the same former HBC school building that held ordnance in 1854. An additional building – a magazine – secured the powder and fixed ammunition. It was located “on a side slope of the parade, walled in the ground with timber and covered with a double roof, one of shingles, and one of boards. In case of fire it is dangerous.”⁶⁷

⁶¹ Hussey, 89- 90, 99- 104.

⁶² Ibid., 208- 12.

⁶³ Ibid., 103- 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 113- 4, 208- 12.

⁶⁵ Report, 1335.

⁶⁶ Joseph K. F. Mansfield, “Report of the Inspection at Fort Vancouver, 28th October to the 8th Nov 1858,” Archives & Records Collection, Fort Vancouver NHS.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

At the time, Sill and Eckerson held in depot 20 new dragoon saddles, 420 Sharps carbines, 218 old rifled muskets, 230 dragoon blankets; 8,000 musket rifled ball cartridges, 9,000 Harper's Ferry rifled ball cartridges, 142,000 Sharps carbine ball cartridges, 39,000 Colts belt pistol ball cartridges, 27,000 Colts dragoon pistol ball cartridges, along with "much other property" considered unnecessary.⁶⁸ Sill had also issued to troops in Washington and Oregon territories one six- pounder field gun, 94,000 cartridges for small arms, 84 rifled muskets, 204 percussion rifles, and 23 swords and sabers.⁶⁹ In addition, he had on hand over 2000 muskets sent out in 1855 for Washington Territory.

Changes in Ordnance

From 1842 to 1845, the federal arsenals in Springfield, Massachusetts and Harpers Ferry, Virginia, fashioned 250,000 of what became known as the Model 1842 Musket. These quickly became standard issue for the U.S. Army's soldiers. By 1855, though, technological advances – particularly in rifling techniques – rendered the muskets obsolete, and the Model 1855 Rifle Musket gained widespread prominence. Most recognizable in these new weapons was the Maynard tape primer system (similar to a roll of caps from a modern child's cap gun), which replaced the percussion caps used for ignition in the earlier muskets. This model was the first to use as ammunition the .58 caliber round known as the Minié ball or bullet (see Plate 8). These new arms were initially destined for the army's regular infantry units, so many of the obsolete muskets were sent to states and militias to meet quotas.⁷⁰

Vancouver is a case in point; in 1855, the aforementioned 2,000 muskets were sent to the depot as part of the annual quota for Washington Territory. At the time, the Ordnance Department also began systematically collecting and then rifling the barrels of the obsolete model 1842 muskets, and various locations were set up for this work. The Benicia Arsenal became the West Coast's repository, and by late November, Sill requested permission to ship the 2,000 muskets to Benicia for rifling.⁷¹

In contrast to the muskets and rifle muskets stood the Sharps carbines. More than 20 inches shorter in length, more than a pound lighter, and firing a .52 caliber shot, this carbine was ideal for cavalry use. First issued to the U.S. Army in

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Sill to Craig, 15 July 1858, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁷⁰ Earl J. Coates & Dean S. Thomas, *An Introduction to Civil War Small Arms* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1990), 10- 5.

⁷¹ Ibid.; Sill to Craig, Washington D.C., 27 November 1858, Number 22, NARA OCO Letters Received.

1854, the Vancouver Depot counted over 400 of them in the 1858 inventory and in November, Sill inquired about the cost of obtaining more.⁷²

Early Challenges to Operational Success

As an office, Sill and Eckerson used a small room partitioned off in the Ordnance Storehouse, since no office had ever been “formally authorised for the Depot at this place.”⁷³ Their work was primarily administrative in nature; Eckerson described the depot as a station “where nothing is fabricated, but where supplies of all kinds have been received in bulk from other posts and afterwards issued in small quantities.”⁷⁴ This work also required manual labor, and the depot had yet to receive approval for a permanent detachment; instead, fifteen soldiers from the adjacent Fort Vancouver served ninety day stints of extra duty at the depot. The learning curve for these soldiers was sizeable. “The men thus detailed from the line enter upon duty with me totally ignorant, in a manner, of the peculiar duties required of them, and are taken from me...just as they have begun to be useful under my instruction,” exclaimed Eckerson.⁷⁵ The cold and damp weather of late autumn soon forced the two to relocate to a room in Eckerson’s personal quarters. “The room in the Storehouse is, during the winter, unendurable on account of the Cold,” he complained. The possibility of adding a stove to the room was not tenable, in Sill’s eyes, because not only was it the only storehouse that the entire department depended upon, but the “crowded state of the Small magazine” had required that he store a large quantity of cartridges in the building, “thus constituting a still stronger reason against employment of any fire in the building.”⁷⁶

The cessation of construction, coupled with the uncomfortable work environment, undoubtedly hamstrung the vision of Sill – the establishment of an arsenal in the territory. Sill wrote regularly to Craig in Washington D.C, trying to prepare as much as possible for any resumption in construction. In October, “to make sure of no detention in our building operations next year,” he again requisitioned metal parts for a new magazine and storehouse – parts that had been expected on the overdue steamer *Borneo* – as well as a wagon and team of horses for “cleaning up the ground now much encumbered with brush- wood, trees, etc.”⁷⁷

Sill recognized the necessity for expanding the depot and establishing a fully fledged arsenal in the territory, and forwarded “certain considerations” to Craig

⁷² Coates & Thomas, 45; Sill to Craig, 1 December 1858, Number 24, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁷³ Sill to Craig, 9 December 1858, Number 25, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁷⁴ Eckerson to Craig, 20 December 1858, Number 15, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁷⁵ Eckerson to Craig, 1 February 1858, Number 23, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Sill to Craig, 20 October 1858, Number 25, NARA OCO Letters Received.

“to show why this arsenal should be immediately rendered self- dependent.”⁷⁸ He noted that the nearest arsenal, in Benicia, was 800 sea- miles away, and requisitions often consumed ten to twelve days – “of no small moment, even during the ordinary Indian warfare of the country.” He also cited the rapid growth of the area, noting the “additional incentives” it afforded a foreign power to wage war, thus raising the possibility of foreign blockades of the mouth of the Columbia and invasion from Puget Sound. “In view of such contingencies,” he exclaimed, “Vancouver must sooner or later be an indispensable point for furnishing extensive and rapid supplies of stores to all the surrounding region – and it is not deemed premature to urge the speedy erection of a Laboratory & Armorer’s Shop, as a nucleus on which we may enlarge as the times may demand.”⁷⁹

The erection of such facilities, he felt, would allow for the manufacture of arms and ammunition, rather than the storage of purchased materials. Craig’s responses could not have been heartening; he informed Sill that the building materials from the East Coast had been diverted to Benicia. “As soon as it is ascertained that the obstacles to the erection of the Ordnance Depot buildings at Vancouver have been removed,” Craig explained, “measures will be taken to remove the supply of Materials.”⁸⁰

Army Reorganization and General Harney’s Arrival

In the autumn of 1858, the army reorganized on a national level, resulting in the division of the Department of the Pacific, headquartered in San Francisco, into the Department of California and the Department of Oregon. The latter included all of Oregon and Washington territories, with a headquarters at Fort Vancouver. Placed in command of this department of Oregon was William Selby Harney – one of the early army’s most brash, colorful, and controversial personalities.

A Democrat, friend of Andrew Jackson, convert to Roman Catholicism and a veteran of many army campaigns, including the Seminole Wars, the Blackhawk War, and the Mexican War, the Tennessee native’s zeal had nonetheless earned him a ruthless, brutal reputation. After announcing “By God, I’m for battle – not peace,” he earned sobriquets of “The Butcher” and “The Big Chief Who Swears” in the Battle of Ash Hollow in 1855, where Brule Lakota men, women, and children were indiscriminately killed.⁸¹ During the Mexican War, General John E.

⁷⁸ Sill to Craig, 1 July 1858, Number 25, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Craig to Sill, 9 December 1858, Page 399, Volume 18, NARA OCO Letters Sent.

⁸¹ Reavis, 292- 4. Michael Vouri, *The Pig War: Standoff at Griffin Bay* (Friday Harbor WA: Griffin Bay Bookstore, 1999), 52- 9. Thomas F. Meehan, *The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume VII* (New

Wool described Harney as exhibiting “extreme imbecility and manifest incapacity,” and Colonel Stephen W. Kearney wrote that Harney had “no more brains than a Greyhound. Yet, I consider that by his stupidity and repair in action, he has done more to inject the Indians with a fear of us...than all the other commanders.”⁸²

Such peer review notwithstanding, he continued to rise in rank, engaging in many personal, political, and petty conflicts along the way. Many of his problems seem to have stemmed from perceived injustices, and Harney held the letter of the law in high regard, often citing it “against any individual who disagreed with him,” according to one biographer. “In an army composed of officers jealous and distrustful of each other, Harney was not above using the court martial as a means of revenge against his professional adversaries.”⁸³

Controversy and Conflict

Soon after his arrival at Fort Vancouver, Harney began making the customary departmental appointments. In a general order issued on October 27, 1858, Harney placed Sill in charge of the Ordnance Department for the Department of Oregon and considered him the “ordnance Officer of the depot at Fort Vancouver”.⁸⁴ Thus, Sill seems to have assumed a dual role; the officer assigned by the Ordnance Division in Washington D.C. to establish Vancouver Arsenal, and the officer in charge of the local departmental depot. According to a biographer, Sill “performed the duties of his office with energy and efficiency,” but with inclement conditions forcing Sill and Eckerson from their makeshift office in the old, crowded storehouse, Sill applied to Harney for “a suitable room as an office” to which he believed himself entitled under the auspices of his position as the “senior Ordnance Officer” of the department.⁸⁵ Harney rejected Sill’s request. Through his adjutant, Alfred Pleasonton (who would later become a general and command cavalry at the Battle of Gettysburg), Harney related that:

As the orders assigning you to duty in this department
are specific in naming you to the duty of erecting an
arsenal at Fort Vancouver, the general commanding

York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910). Available online at:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07140a.htm>.

⁸² Vouri, 54- 5.

⁸³ Richmond L. Clow, “William S. Harney,” *Soldier’s West: Biographies from the Military Frontier*, ed. Paul Andrew Hutton (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 53- 4.

⁸⁴ General Orders No. 2, Head Quarters, Department of Oregon, October 27, 1858. NARA OCO Letters Received; Alfred Pleasonton, Fort Vancouver W.T., to Sill, 02 December 1858, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁸⁵ Reid, 919- 20. Sill to Pleasonton, 01 December 1858, Number 27, NARA OCO Letters Received.

[Harney] does not think it would be becoming and proper to separate you from those duties sufficiently as to recognize you in the light of senior ordnance officer at the headquarters of this department... from your position of ordnance officer of the depot at Fort Vancouver you are entitled to an office and fuel, which you are authorized to obtain in the usual manner as the service requires at the other ordnance stations.⁸⁶

Sill, filled with “painful perplexity”, responded the following day with incredulity and strong language:

There surely can be no doubt that the only Ordnance Officer in this Department must be the Senior Ordnance Officer therein...It was certainly never anticipated by me for a moment that in transmitting my application through the proper Channel for authorization as a *matter of form* it would be detained and questioned whether a matter of right. Still farther was it from my mind that there was anything *unbecoming* or *improper* in requesting the fulfillment of so express a stipulation...Sooner than remain content with my anomalous relation to the Dept. of Oregon as defined in your letter, or submit to what appears to me in the light of indignity and humiliation – self respect demands that I should at once make application to the Chief of Ordnance to be relieved from the specific duty devolving on me at this place.⁸⁷

The letter seems to have further provoked the ire of Harney. Considering the language to be “disrespectful and subversive of good order and discipline,” he ordered Sill held under arrest, though also allowing him the opportunity to “modify his language.” Sill responded, explaining that he “had no intention of employing in that letter any expressions which I supposed would be interpreted as disrespectful,” but this failed to mollify Harney; he resorted to past practices and charged Sill with “contempt and disrespect to his superior officer.”⁸⁸

Furthermore, on December 4, Harney appointed James S. White as the depot’s acting ordnance officer, thus replacing Sill in this capacity. Post returns show that

⁸⁶ Reavis, 292- 4.

⁸⁷ Sill to Pleasonton, 03 December 1858, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Sill was held “In Arrest” from January through March 1859.⁸⁹ On May 12, Sill received word that his request for transfer had been approved, and that he had been reassigned to Watervliet Arsenal. He departed by July 27 when his replacement, William Thomas Welcker, assumed command.⁹⁰

Sill had a short but distinguished career after his reassignment. In 1861, he resigned from the army and accepted a position as professor of mathematics and civil engineering at the Brooklyn Collegiate and Polytechnic Institute. Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, Sill joined an Ohio volunteer regiment and quickly rose to the rank of brigadier general. On December 31, 1862, Sill was killed in combat at the battle of Stones River. “Sill’s modesty and courage were exceeded only by a capacity that had already been demonstrated in many practical ways,” remembered Philip H. Sheridan, his friend and West Point classmate, “and his untimely death...abruptly closed a career which, had it been prolonged a little more, not only would have shed additional luster on his name, but would have been of marked benefit to his country.”⁹¹ Sheridan later commemorated his classmate by naming Oklahoma’s Fort Sill in his honor.

⁸⁹ Post Returns, January 1859 to March 1859, NARA Microfilm.

⁹⁰ Post Returns, July 1859, NARA Microfilm.

⁹¹ P.H. Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan* (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1888), 209.

Construction Starts...and Stops...and Starts: 1859 to 1861

If Harney's hopes had been for Sill's replacement to be a diametrically different individual, at first glance the Ordnance Department's appointment of William Thomas Welcker certainly afforded such an opportunity. Like Sill, Welcker was the son of a prominent attorney who distinguished himself at West Point. Also like Sill, Welcker was highly regarded by Sheridan, who considered Welcker "a warm and intimate friend."⁹² Welcker, though, like Harney, was a Democrat and a Tennessee native, born in Athens in 1830. He had graduated fourth in his class from the U.S. Military Academy in 1851 joined the ordnance department soon after. Welcker's family – including pregnant wife Kate, and one year- old daughter Ada, joined him at the new posting. Within days of his arrival, Welcker found himself involved in an issue with Harney, centered on the arsenal.

One mile east of Fort Vancouver lay a 100 acre tract of land that Harney considered his private property. With Harney's encouragement, Welcker visited the site and noted its improvements. In conversation, Harney directed Welcker to communicate to him, in writing, whether or not he felt the property would be of use to the Ordnance Department for the establishment of the arsenal. Welcker responded:

I deem the tract more suitable for an Arsenal than the present Ordnance Reserve, as it is a little more remote from the buildings and people of the town and Fort of Vancouver, and consequently a better situation for Magazines of Powder. This tract is also a much more beautiful situation, in my opinion, than the present Reserve; and it possesses the additional and great advantage of not being claimed by any other party, while to twenty acres of the present reservation there are, I am told, two if not three claimants. ⁹³

Any honeymoon was soon over for Welcker; by September 1, in anticipation of conflict with Harney, he pleaded to Craig:

I must request you to furnish me with a statement of what my official relation to him [Harney] is. Am I under his command to a limited extent? Or to any extent at all? ...The order which I received from the Secretary of War assigning me to duty at the

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ William T. Welcker, Vancouver Depot W.T., to Pleasonton, 02 August 1859, Number 25, NARA OCO Letters Received.

Vancouver Depot did not require me to report to General Harney...But if I am to receive orders both from the Ordnance Bureau and Department Head Quarters, it will place me in an embarrassing situation. A man cannot obey two distinct commanding officers...Nothing has yet occurred in the way of a serious interference, but I think it may happen at any moment and I desire to know what my duty is then.”⁹⁴

Welcker’s intuition would soon prove correct. In the meantime, Harney became mired in the dispute known as the Pig War, where war with Britain over the Northwest boundary of the U.S. was narrowly averted. That autumn, Craig informed Welcker that the department had not approved the recommendation to purchase Harney’s land, and Welcker duly informed Harney. Following this disapproval, Craig authorized limited construction to begin onsite. In very direct terms, he wrote:

Yet until the land already selected shall have been legally confirmed to us for an Arsenal, or the titles thereabouts shall have been so quitted that we can purchase a valid fee simple title, nothing more than the most temporary shelter for our stores and employees must be built.⁹⁵

Construction Begins

This was Welcker’s window of opportunity, and thus began construction of Ordnance Department buildings on the grounds of the Ordnance Depot in the fall of 1859 (see Plate 9). By December 27, he reported two buildings nearing completion, and two others under construction. “As it is,” he related, “I have three of my Married Men comfortably sheltered with their families in the soldiers’ quarters; and will be able to occupy the officers cottage with my family for the winter. I should in a couple of months, at most, have had shops and a laboratory up and ready for use.”⁹⁶ Welcker later explained in detail the process of erecting the cottage:

In erecting this building, I took some of the heavy [illegible word] already on hand and made the sills of them; these I placed on wooden blocks which I sawed

⁹⁴ Welcker to H.K. Craig, 1 September 1859, Number 25, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Welcker to Craig, 26 December 1859, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁹⁶ Welcker to Craig, 27 December 1859, NARA OCO Letters Received.

in the forest; to these sills were nailed, in an upright position, planks 1 ½ in thick, inside of these, and breaking their joints, was nailed, also in a vertical position, a course of 1- in planks, and the outside crooks were battened over. These planks were unplanned and rough as they came from the mill. On the inside (after the house was up) I tacked the cotton cloth and parted on the [wall] paper to the cloth. These [illegible word] walls are all the support of the roof and super structure, the house has no frame at all and is called in this country the 'balloon' style of building. The cotton cloth and [wall]paper...are by no means of an expensive quality. Some finish to keep the wind out and make a decent appearance was indispensable....⁹⁷

Welcker kept to the spirit of Craig's instructions to keep the buildings "strictly of a temporary nature," but his definition of temporary, especially in the case of the officer's cottage, was up for interpretation. "I will state that the cottage when finished will afford suitable officer's quarters for ten or fifteen years to come," noted Welcker, "and need not be replaced before that time."⁹⁸

He also began hiring additional employees. When Welcker assumed command on July 27, 1859, the Ordnance Depot employed four enlisted men: one armorer, one artificer, and two laborers. That month, the number of officers and enlisted men authorized for the post was raised from six to fifteen, and several men enlisted during the calendar year. Laborers Patrick Maguire and Timothy O'Connor joined by enlistment in August (the former of whom had been the master armorer and master orderly sergeant at Benecia Arsenal), laborer Robert H. Durand joined in September and laborer Benjamin Jones joined in November. Laborers Charles M. McGlenneid and Peter Fox transferred to the post in November, helping fill the ranks of Welcker's detachment.⁹⁹

New arms were also received and distributed. By September, the depot had distributed the "new Rifle Musket," and Captain Pleasonton reported that soldiers were having difficulty fitting the percussion caps over the cones of the new muskets.¹⁰⁰ Welcker also reopened negotiations with the HBC in hopes of obtaining a quit claim to the lands Welcker now called the "Arsenal Reserve." He

⁹⁷ Welcker to Craig, 17 October 1860, Number 561, NARA OCO Letters Received.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Post Returns, October & November, 1859, NARA Microfilm. Durand would later also serve as Welcker's clerk. See Welcker to Craig, 5 November 1860, Number 596, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁰⁰ Welcker to Craig, 1 September 1859, Number 25, NARA OCO Letters Received.

implied that James Allan Graham, the officer in charge of the HBC's Fort Vancouver, supported the concept of a quit claim "from a disposition to be courteous to the U.S." but was "controlled by others superior in office." Instead, he duly reported the HBC's agent, Alexander Grant Dallas, had rejected an offer of \$500 in lieu of the land's full value – "whatever that may be."¹⁰¹

Controversy and Conflict Halt Construction

This progress –and specifically the construction improvements, though officially temporary in nature –soon forced a change of heart in Welcker. He now had several buildings in various stages of completion, access to the wharf and river front, and employees with close proximity to their homes in the growing city of Vancouver. "I recommended the purchase [of Harney's tract] last summer: I would not do so now from the change in circumstances," he wrote to Craig.

Welcker's progress soon came to a screeching halt. On Christmas Eve, 1859, Harney summoned Welcker to his quarters. Harney then shared with him a letter he had received from the War Department, which, to Harney, approved the purchase of his land for the arsenal site and authorized Welcker to lease it in the meantime. Harney confronted Welcker, asking him why he had not been informed of Welcker's authority to lease. He then demanded to see Welcker's correspondence with Craig. Welcker describes the scene:

And he then declared after perusing it that you meant to take it [Harney's land]! And your permission to me to lease was to give time for his titles to be all arranged. In the course of the day, he issued a written order for me to suspend or rather 'to stop' all building...and to report by what authority I had commenced to build...I obeyed this unusual order under a strong protest...This interference is a great embarrassment to me; and if suffered to pass...will, as a precedent, be productive of incalculable trouble.¹⁰²

By January 11, 1860, with no word received from Craig (Welcker's dispatches had been lost when the steamship *Northerner* sunk off the California coast), the Pacific Northwest winter had wreaked havoc on the depot's buildings. "The buildings are being considerably injured from want of completion," Welcker lamented, "by leaking and exposure through the unfinished windows of a portion of the men's quarters." However, lumber –procured from the mill of George

¹⁰¹ Welcker to Craig, 27 December 1859, Number 25, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁰² Welcker to Craig, 27 December 1859, Number 25, NARA OCO Letters Received.

Abernethy and intended for the erection of the temporary shops – was salvageable and available for construction “once the hindrance is removed.”¹⁰³

Welcker also continued to hire new employees; in January he added Caspar Mierhans and James T. Seymour to the detachment’s ranks. Seymour was particularly valuable to the fledgling depot; a “good man and a competent mechanic & saddler,” he had served at Benicia Arsenal for five years. Welcker planned to appoint him as an armorer, since the four existing mechanics already met his hiring goals for the position.¹⁰⁴ By March, he had established a guard, “though without any non-commissioned officers to take charge of it.”¹⁰⁵

Winter turned to spring, and Welcker eagerly anticipated authority to resume construction of depot buildings. “I am still waiting anxiously,” he recounted in June, “to hear from my protest against General Harney’s interference with, and suspension of, the operations I was conducting under your orders, last December.”¹⁰⁶ In addition, he brought charges against Harney for “conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman,” stemming from the December confrontation.¹⁰⁷ In the meantime, Welcker became privy to Harney’s official correspondence as published by Congress, and found “with astonishment the infamous aspersion attempted to be cast upon my character” by Harney in a letter to Colonel Cooper the previous December. “I there saw also with the most lively emotions of gratitude and pleasure your noble and generous defence of me.” Welcker’s “hindrance” was soon removed, in part, just a few weeks later. On June 23, the *Portland Weekly Oregonian* announced that “General Harney has leave of absence for twelve months, and that Col. [George] Wright, in future, takes charge of the Department.”¹⁰⁸ By July 14, Harney had departed, shortly after informing the War Department that he had sold the tract of land proposed for the arsenal. “So I suppose there is an end of that matter, and I am glad of it” reflected Welcker; “I regret that I ever had anything to do with it.”¹⁰⁹

With Harney out of the picture, Welcker looked forward to permission to resume construction. He also had time to contemplate the name of the post:

In case the depot is declared an Arsenal I will respectfully recommend that it be not called “Vancouver Arsenal.” There are too many Vancouvers here now: the American Fort Vancouver;

¹⁰³ Welcker to Craig, 11 January 1860, Number 123, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁰⁴ Welcker to Craig, 31 January 1860, Number 142, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁰⁵ Welcker to Craig, 6 March 1860, Number 176, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁰⁶ Welcker to Craig, 2 June 1860, Number 690, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁰⁷ Welcker to Craig, 22 September 1860, Number 577, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁰⁸ *Portland Weekly Oregonian*, 23 June 1860, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Welcker to Craig, 20 July 1860, Number 404, NARA OCO Letters Received.

the lately abandoned Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Vancouver, the town of Vancouver and the Fort Vancouver Depot of the Quartermaster's department, in addition to the Vancouver Depot which I command. I do not see the necessity or propriety of calling an American Arsenal after a British navigator. The Columbia Arsenal, as the name is one that has national associations and at the same time indicates the locality, would seem to be suitable."¹¹⁰

However, the matter of Harney's suspension of construction was not quite resolved; on July 18, the Adjutant General's Office in Washington D.C. wrote to Wright informing him of the Secretary of War's decision to dismiss the matter of the lease or purchase of Harney's land. While ruling that Welker erred by "entering into an arrangement and then taking possession of the land without proper authority," it found no cause for "any imputation against his conduct or motives in the matter." It did uphold Harney's suspension of construction, provided that the buildings were either unnecessary or "of more expensive quality than were needed for temporary use."¹¹¹

Construction Resumes

On August 23, Wright responded. After inspecting the buildings erected by Welcker's direction, he found that they were "not greater in extent or of more expensive quality than I deem absolutely necessary for temporary use." Noting that the buildings were still in need of completion, Wright recommended that construction be resumed.¹¹² Wright's inspection also documented the need for a store house and magazine – thus implying that the work contracted by Eckerson in 1858 had not come to fruition. "An old building which formerly belonged to the Hudson's Bay Company is now used as a store house, but it is in a dilapidated condition and totally unfit for the Security of the stores." Recognizing the department's geographic vulnerability, Wright considered it "of the greatest importance that the ordnance depot should be completely furnished."¹¹³

In August, annoyed by the heat of the summer sun, Welcker moved forward with several small improvements; he authorized the placement of shutters on the windows of the officer's quarters as well as the interior fitting of shelves and

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ W. A. Nichols, Washington D.C., to George Wright, Fort Vancouver, W.T., 18 July 1860, Number 456, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹¹² Wright to S. Cooper, Washington D.C., 23 August 1860, Number 456, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹¹³ Ibid.

closets. He also reported the erection of a small root- house. By utilizing enlisted labor and reusing materials from the “wreck” of several old HBC buildings, there was no direct cost incurred, “except the nails,” he duly noted.¹¹⁴

In October, Welcker submitted a requisition for ordnance and stores at Vancouver Depot. His inventory of existing arms, armament, and equipment (see Appendix 2) is small, and pales to the breadth of his request, which demonstrates that concern for “a war with any Foreign Power” – or perhaps a civil war – certainly existed. To arm new seacoast batteries at the mouth of the Columbia River and Puget Sound, he requested ten 10- inch and ten 8- inch Columbiads and carriages, with 4,000 and 8,000 rounds of ammunition for each. Wright, the department commander, supported Welcker’s request.¹¹⁵

Regarding more local matters, it was not until October 1860, though, that Craig informed Welcker that construction could resume:

The arrangements which you made for putting up temporary shelter for the stores, officers and men, at Vancouver Depot, in consequence of having to abandon the erection of permanent Arsenal buildings for want of a valid title to the land, will now be carried out; the discontinuance of such work, ordered by the former Commander of the military department, being no longer operative in consequence of subsequent action, by the present commander, in relation thereto. Communicate this to Col. Wright.¹¹⁶

Five days later, Craig informed Welcker of the Secretary of War’s decision regarding the rent paid to the HBC for use of their building as the ordnance storehouse:

[T]he rent agreed upon should be paid so long as the use of the Store house is necessarily retained by the Government. But some other arrangement for providing suitable storage should be made by a temporary shelter, if a permanent Storehouse cannot be erected.

¹¹⁴ Welcker to Craig, Washington D.C., 02 August 1860, Number 436, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹¹⁵ “Requisition for Ordnance and Ordnance Stores for Vancouver Depot W.T.,” 13 October 1860, Number 560, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹¹⁶ Craig to Welcker, 5 October 1860, Page 251, Volume 20, NARA OCO Letters Sent.

“And you must bear in mind,” Craig emphasized, “that no permanent building can be erected, till the Attorney general has certified that the Government has a legal title.” He asked Welcker to try to lower the rent; if he was unable, and in need of temporary facility, Craig requested an estimate.¹¹⁷

In response, Welcker made haste, dispatching plans for a temporary storehouse (see Plate 10), a magazine (see Plate 11), and a fence. “These are of immediate necessity,” he added, “and should go up first.”¹¹⁸ The construction would be of lumber, he explained, since there was “no near prospect of erecting the brick buildings.” The storehouse envisioned was a two story building with an attic, where “many light articles can be deposited.” The temporary magazine, though not fire proof, “when no longer needed for powder, with slight alterations can be made available for other useful purposes, as a store house or shop &c.” Welcker recommended a pitch of 45 degrees for the roofs of both buildings, “on account of the great quantity of rain which falls in this country, and to prevent the accumulation of great weights of snow on the tops of the houses.” Both buildings, although temporary, were intended to “serve as store- houses for a number of years, and need not be destroyed or removed when this trouble about the title is over.” Surrounding the magazine he proposed “a high stockade fence and a ditch to keep off fire and intruders.” Welcker’s letter also sheds some light on the depot’s official status. “If there is any difficulty about declaring the post an Arsenal,” Welcker asked, “the Secretary at least has the power to make this a double- ration post.”¹¹⁹

Personnel Challenges

One of Welcker’s major challenges was that of personnel. Labor was at a premium in the vicinity, and the prospect of a career at the depot drew few enlistees. By the summer of 1860, Welcker’s detachment consisted of twelve men. Conveniently, housing was available at the post for several men and their families. Census data from 1860 provides valuable information about these families. Welcker and his wife Kate, a Kentucky native, lived in one house with their children (Ada and eight month old William) and a 26 year old Irish woman – presumably a servant – named Bridget Murray. Patrick McGuire served as master armorer; the 39 year- old Irish native lived in a small house near the Welcker’s with his wife Grace and their children Mary, John, Thomas, Ellen, and Rosetta. The depot’s blacksmith, B. J. McMahan, also lived nearby with his wife Jane and children Alex, James, and Kate. Like McGuire and his wife, McMahan and his wife were natives of Ireland. The remaining employees either lived or worked

¹¹⁷ Craig to Welcker, 16 October 1860, Page 263, Volume 20, NARA OCO Letters Sent.

¹¹⁸ Welcker to Craig, 20 November 1860, Number 690, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹¹⁹ Welcker to Craig, 20 November 1860, NARA OCO Letters Received.

together in another adjacent building. They included two armorers (49 year old James Seymour, a Maryland native, and 26 year old Robert H. Durand, a Pennsylvania native), two carriage makers (24 year- old John A. Devine, a native of New Brunswick, and 27 year- old Dennis Drisco, a native of Ireland), three artificers (25 year- old Thomas O’Conner and 27 year- old Charles McGimare, both natives of Ireland, and 39 year- old A. Lewis, a native of New York), and four laborers (27 year- old Cornelius Croley, a native of Ireland; Louis Debback, a twenty year- old Pennsylvania native; Peter Wood, a 28 year- old native of Ireland; and Casper Merrihause, a 24 year- old native of Switzerland.

In addition to routine duties that included overhauling of ammunition and the repair and upkeep of items ranging from rifle muskets to artillery swords to leather cap pouches, evidence suggest that these employees had begun production activities at the depot by 1860. One modern day source notes that the depot produced 320,205 small arms cartridges that year.¹²⁰ This production may have been experimental, for it was certainly short lived; it terminated the following year, not to resume until 1863, and even then at a significantly reduced production rate.¹²¹

By November, his detachment still consisted of twelve men; three short of his authorized amount and well below his requested number of 25 men. This reality necessitated extreme measures:

Of my 12 men, 1 is acting Sergeant, Store Keeper, Superintendent of laborers and filling many other functions., 1 is clerk, 1 is hostler and teamster and 1 is continually occupied as cook (in monthly tours) leaving but eight for guard, supposing none are sick. (At the present time, two are on the sick report.) I have a guard only of two men and no non-commissioned officer in charge of it. These men are on post six hours at a time, 12 in twenty four, and go upon guard every fourth day or oftener if any one is sick.¹²²

Welcker’s concerns for depot security were not unfounded; the nation was divided over the issue of slavery, and the possibility of pro- slavery states seceding from the Union – and even initiating rebellion – was a reality after the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency. The concentration of arms and ammunition in federal arsenals made them especially attractive to factions intent on hostility,

¹²⁰ Thomas, 65.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Welcker to Craig, 23 November 1860, Number 8, NARA OCO Letters Received.

and groups on both sides of the slavery and states' rights issues had made or planned attempts to seize them. One year earlier, the abolitionist John Brown had led an unsuccessful but highly reported attempt to capture the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in hopes of supplying arms for a widespread slave revolt. Just days after Welker's communiqué, South Carolina seceded from the Union and militia units seized the federal arsenal in Charleston, South Carolina. By September 1861, several federal arsenals – including the Liberty, Fayetteville, Harpers Ferry, Little Rock, Baton Rouge, Mount Vernon, Appalachicola, and Augusta Arsenals, along with the San Antonio Ordnance Depot – would be seized by pro- Confederate forces, and the federal arsenal in St. Louis would soon be “in hourly danger of attack” from pro- secession forces, resulting in the stationing of 2,000 Union troops there.¹²³

Just three days after the capture of the Charleston Arsenal – and almost exactly a year after Welker's run- in with Harney – an attempt was made to break into the Vancouver Depot. Welcker's guard of two men, each working half the night, examined the storehouse grounds every two hours, but this was not sufficient. Just after 5:00 a.m. on the morning of December 28, 1860, thieves stole onto the depot grounds. They tried to pry open the shutters on two of the windows of the ordnance storehouse, and also tried to remove the staple securing the door lock, but were unsuccessful. They had better success next door. Welcker had been using a small nearby “shanty” as an office, and the thieves wrenched off the building's lock, gaining access to the interior. Half a ream of letter paper, two bottles of ink and “some small particles of stationary” were the only tangible losses, but Welcker used the opportunity to augment his request for personnel. “I now recommend earnestly,” he wrote Craig, “the increase of the detachment to 40 men.”¹²⁴

More Buildings Designed and Approved

In early January 1861, Welcker forwarded plans for two additional temporary buildings at the depot – a workshop building and a laboratory (see Plate 12). The workshop building Welcker designed was a “wooden building of rough fir lumber” one hundred feet long and twenty- five feet wide, to be partitioned into five distinct work areas, each twenty feet wide with its own six doorway and window. These shops would include workspace for saddlers, carriage makers, blacksmiths, armorers, and a paint shop. With enough fir lumber procured the previous winter to satisfy the core building needs, he estimated the building's cost at \$1,272.40.¹²⁵ In contrast, Welcker designed the 80 foot by 20 foot laboratory as

¹²³ Thomas, 26; Portland *Weekly Oregonian*, 25 May 1861.

¹²⁴ Welcker to Craig, 31 December 1860, Number 83, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹²⁵ Welcker to Craig, 7 January 1861, Number 127, NARA OCO Letters Received.

one large, open room to provide for “the ordinary manufacture or repair of ammunition, fire works, &c &c.” To combat interior dampness, Welcker proposed a ceiling or lining of cedar. He estimated the total cost of the building – again, less the fir lumber already on hand – at \$710.00.¹²⁶ (See Appendix 3 for Welcker’s itemized cost projections for both buildings.)

Craig approved the construction of the shops and laboratory in March, recommending that the former be reduced in size to eighty by twenty feet and with the pitch in the roofs reduced. If considered “absolutely necessary for the protection of the public property” he authorized Welcker to erect them at once. As to their location, he directed that “[s]ites should be selected for these buildings that will not interfere with the erection of more permanent structures when a good title is received.”¹²⁷

While Welcker’s planning continued, the status of the depot and proposed arsenal remained uncertain. In February 1861, Welcker learned that Craig was stepping down from his position. This seemed to cause him consternation. On several occasions, he had requested updates from Craig on the status of an additional twenty acre tract of land for the ordnance reserve, but had not received word if it had been authorized by the president. He also inquired about the post’s status as an arsenal, thereby briefly chronicling its history and describing many of its functions at the time:

It seems to me that it is legally an Arsenal now, and should be declared. An appropriation was made by law for the establishment of an arsenal in this region under that law a location for the arsenal has been selected, and the establishment of the arsenal commenced and I now in charge of it am performing some of the usual and more important duties of an Arsenal; to wit: arming and equipping the U.S. troops in this department and supplying them with ammunition; storing and preserving arms, equipments and military munitions, repairing, et. cet. The arsenal is in an unfinished condition it is true, but so are all of them, more or less; and the fact that certain parties have set up claims to portions of the reserve does not invalidate the claims of the post to being considered an arsenal...So that it seems to me that the post is clearly entitled to be recognized and named an arsenal

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Craig to Welcker, 6 March 1861, Page 421, Volume 20, NARA OCO Letters Received.

by the proper authority, for such is the intent of the law making the appropriation.¹²⁸

Despite not receiving the requested funds for construction, by April Welcker reported that the quarters had been finished and the foundation blocks for the storehouse had been laid. He also briefly outlined his plans for painting – “a stone colored wash and a yellow wash for the fences.” Welcker had not yet received Craig’s approval to begin construction on the workshop building and laboratory, and it does not appear that he initiated any construction.¹²⁹ This was not the only challenge facing Welcker. That same month, the nation erupted in war.

The Civil War and Its Impact

War could not have come at a less opportune time for the federal arsenals. As hostilities broke out, many found themselves lacking in both arms and ammunition. This was not coincidental. As a later congressional investigation revealed, beginning in 1859 Secretary of War John B. Floyd, a Virginia native, had slowly but steadily ordered the transfer of arms and equipment from northern arsenals to southern ones. This was no small affair; according to the Mobile (Alabama) Advertiser:

During the past year 135,430 muskets have been quietly transferred from the Northern arsenal at Springfield [Massachusetts] alone, to those in the Southern States. We are much obliged to Secretary Floyd for the foresight he has thus displayed in disarming the North and equipping the South for this emergency. There is no telling the quantity of arms and munitions which were sent South from other Northern arsenals. There is no doubt but that every man in the South who can carry a gun can now be supplied from private or public sources. The Springfield contribution alone would arm all the militiamen of Alabama and Mississippi.¹³⁰

This action was not limited to small arms; heavy artillery was also involved. As one example, Floyd ordered the federal arsenal at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to transfer 113 Columbiads, four 32- pounders, and seven 32- pounders to two forts

¹²⁸ Welcker to Craig, 15 February 1861, Number 160, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹²⁹ Welcker to Craig, 10 April 1861, Number 299, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹³⁰ Samuel P. Bates, *Martial Deeds of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: T.H. Davis & Co., 1876), 79- 80.

on the Mississippi and Texas coasts – both still under construction and not yet able to mount such armament.¹³¹

Not only were the arms and armament of the federal arsenals affected, though – its personnel were, too. Many of the Ordnance Department’s most highly regarded officers resigned their commissions, and many of these soon joined the Confederate cause. Alfred Mordecai, the department’s greatest scientific mind, resigned his commission but refused the Chief of Ordnance position with the Confederacy. Josiah Gorgas had no such qualms; he resigned his U.S. commission and accepted the Confederacy’s Chief of Ordnance position, later earning the rank of brigadier general. Benjamin Huger left the department and accepted a colonelcy in the Confederate artillery, later rising to the rank of major general. William Bell and John F. Lee also cast their lots with the Confederacy.¹³²

Welcker, the Tennessee native, soon followed suit. He relinquished command of the post on July 23, 1861 to Abram Calvin Wildrick, a first lieutenant with the Third U.S. Artillery stationed at Fort Vancouver, and began an official leave of absence.¹³³ By August, the Adjutant General’s Office had officially dismissed Welcker, stating that he had “given proof of his disloyalty.”¹³⁴ However, documentary evidence shows no direct indication of perfidy. On his last day of service, Welcker documented the transmittal of all cash and property accounts under his charge, and even announced the enlistment of laborer Andrew Johnson.¹³⁵

Welcker’s Legacy

Welcker left a significant legacy at the ordnance depot. Although the post never officially obtained the status of arsenal that Welcker so keenly sought, it did see new and significant – albeit temporary – construction. By the time of his departure, the depot included an officer’s cottage that housed the commander and his family; a soldiers’ quarters that housed three married employees and their families; a small root house; possibly a small “shanty” office near the rented storehouse; and at least the foundation blocks for a new storehouse. Welcker had also designed – and submitted for approval – plans for a magazine, laboratory,

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² C.E. Dutton, “The Ordnance Department,” *The Army of the United States: Historical Sketches of Staff and Line with Portraits of Generals-in-Chief*, ed. T.F. Rodenbough & William Haskin (New York: Maynard, Merrill, & Co., 1896), 132.

¹³³ Post Returns, July & August, 1861, NARA Microfilm.

¹³⁴ “General Orders No. 63, War Department Adjutant General’s Office, Washington D.C., 22 August 1861,” *General Orders of the War Department, Vol. I.* (New York: Derby & Miller, 1864), 112- 3.

¹³⁵ Welcker to Craig, 23 July 1861, Numbers 551, 552, & 553, NARA OCO Letters Received.

and workshop building. He appears to have initiated the production of small arms cartridges at the site. He also tripled the detachment of employees and laid ground work for further staffing increases in Vancouver, and requisitioned heavy artillery for coastal batteries near the mouth of the Columbia River. Lastly, he managed all of this despite the abject interference of a very obstreperous department commander – interference that had crippled the efforts of his predecessor.

Interestingly, Welcker did not immediately depart for the east as originally reported by the press.¹³⁶ A year later, on July 14, 1862, Welcker was admitted as an attorney to the bar in Oregon, where he practiced law until 1864, when he joined the Confederate Army and commanded troops as the captain of an artillery unit. Following the war, he relocated to California where he was the last appointment to the faculty of the new University of California at Berkeley. Welcker chaired Berkeley's mathematics department and taught military science from 1869 to 1881 when the regents "became enmeshed in some political or personal quarrel" – according to the UC Berkeley general history – and removed Welcker and the university's president from their positions. The following year, Welcker became California's Superintendent of Public Instruction – and thus an *ex officio* member of the University of California Board of Regents – and he served for four years until 1887. He returned to practicing law, this time in San Francisco, and then was reinstated as Professor Emeritus of Mathematics in 1898. While at Berkeley in 1874, he authored *Military Lessons: A Text- Book for Military Schools, Colleges, and the Militia*. He died in 1900.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ See the *Portland Morning Oregonian*, 03 August 1861.

¹³⁷ See *University of California History: Digital Archives* entries, including "Mathematics" http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/UCHistory/general_history/campuses/ucb/departments_m.html and "William Thomas Reid" at http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/UCHistory/general_history/overview/presidents/index.html, and Fabian Franklin, *The Life of Daniel Coit Gilman* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1910), III.

Eckerson Returns: 1861 to 1865

With units from the Third Artillery present at neighboring Fort Vancouver, First Lieutenant Abram Calvin Wildrick assumed temporary command of the arsenal on 23 July 1861 (see Plate 13). This was to be a temporary assignment; on October 16, John C. Stone, an employee of Benicia Arsenal, received orders to report to Vancouver to relieve Wildrick. Eight days later, special orders arrived assigning another Benicia employee to the command of the Vancouver Depot – someone very familiar with the post.¹³⁸

“I have to express my thanks to the Brigadier General at the Ordnance Department,” exclaimed Eckerson, “for assigning me to the charge of Vancouver Depot, a station established by me some eight years since, in the vicinity of which many of my friends reside, including the sureties on my official Bond.”¹³⁹ By November 10, Eckerson and his family were en route back to Vancouver.

Due to his previous duty at the post, Eckerson was able to step immediately into his new responsibilities. On November 13, he sent Craig’s successor, Brigadier General James W. Ripley, revised cost estimates for the temporary shops and laboratory, along with his support for the project:

I find that the Storehouse is used for the various kinds of labor performed by the Detachment, including the overhauling of ammunition, and that the temporary shops and laboratory...are highly necessary. Considerable [sic] may be done at this station in the way of preparing small- arm ammunition, as soon as the laboratory is erected, and it may be many years before a permanent building of the kind can be authorized.¹⁴⁰

With aims “to avoid the inevitable rise in the wages of mechanics, which must take place the moment the upper Columbia is opened this Spring,” Eckerson initiated construction of the temporary shops and laboratory in early 1862.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Eckerson to James W. Ripley, Washington D.C., 28 October 1861, Number 141, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Eckerson to Ripley, 13 November 1861, Number 177, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁴¹ Eckerson to Ripley, 2 April 1862, Number 212, NARA OCO Letters Received.

Post Nomenclature & Publicity

Although Eckerson's background and political views seem to have been very different from Welcker's, he did share some sentiment – a change in post nomenclature. He wrote to Ripley:

I would respectfully recommend that the name of this station be changed to either "Columbia Arsenal" or "Vancouver Arsenal." At present there are three government establishments here known as "Vancouver Depot," viz: the Quartermaster's Depot, the Subsistence Depot, and the Ordnance Depot; and confusion is often inevitable. Especially is this the case in the reception of letters and packages addressed "Commanding Officer, Vancouver Depot," which are continually liable to be opened by those for whom they are not intended. Either of the names above recommended would properly indicate the locality.¹⁴²

In an article published in the August 15 edition of the *Portland Morning Oregonian*, however, there was no confusing the post with any other. Titled "Ordnance Department at Fort Vancouver," and littered with patriotic rhetoric, it nonetheless summarized the recent construction at the Ordnance Depot, noting the presence of a storehouse, shop building, laboratory, magazine, commander's quarters, workers' quarters, and an office under construction:

In a visit to Vancouver, some days since, we could not fail to notice the improvements in the Ordnance Department. The position of Military Store keeper until near November last, was held by a secesh who was dismissed from service. He had done little for Government, except to relieve the Treasury of the amount of his salary. Capt Eckerson, the present commanding officer, arrived there and entered upon duty in November last. As soon as Spring fairly opened in March – he commenced putting up buildings. There are now upon the Ordnance grounds an extensive store house – a one [illegible] building, in which are soldiers, blacksmiths, painters and carpenters shops; a building for a laboratory a magazine, quarters for the commander, and for the artifices and families connected with the

¹⁴² Eckerson to Ripley, 19 July 1862, Number 295, NARA OCO Letters Received.

establishment – and a neat building for an office is now in process of construction. The grounds are well graded have a beautiful exposure to the river, the buildings are all neat unexpensive, yet in good taste, and the views from the grounds embrace all the fine scenery for which the vicinity of Vancouver is known. We saw on the grounds spars for a flag staff of beautiful proportions, and which was to be erected in a few days, the predecessor of Capt. Eckerson had neglected to provide one not being anxious to see the Stars and Stripes float over the Ordnance grounds, or any where else a feeling entirely dissimilar to about to be exhibited by Capt. Eckerson. The erection of the Ordnance buildings and the improvement of the grounds has been mainly done as already stated under the direction of Capt. Eckerson and they certainly do honor to his taste [illegible] expense and their evident capacity for usefulness. The grounds, graded this season without a seed having been sown, yielded a fine crop of timothy and clover showing the natural adaptation of the soil to these crops.¹⁴³

That autumn, Eckerson proposed that another building, purpose undisclosed, be erected at an estimated cost of \$693.42, which he had received by January 1863. However, he wrote to Ripley that the building was unnecessary by that time. Seven years earlier, in 1856, the army had built a blockhouse to the northeast of the row of quarters at their Fort Vancouver. By January 1863, the post commander, Brevet Major Pinckney Lugenbeel, felt it was in excess to his needs and better used by the Ordnance Department, upon whose portion of the military reserve the building actually occupied, and thus he turned over the facility (see Plate 14). Eckerson soon outfitted it as family quarters for one of his staff members, “putting in partitions and staircase and adding to the building a kitchen and outhouses, besides enclosing the whole with a picket fence.”¹⁴⁴ He also utilized a portion of the appropriation to build two additional rooms onto his quarters to accommodate his growing family. The “peculiar construction” of the house’s attic rendered it cold and uninhabitable in the winter months, Eckerson explained.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Portland *Morning Oregonian*, 15 August 1862.

¹⁴⁴ Eckerson to Lawrence S. Babbitt, Vancouver Arsenal, W.T., 10 February 1866, Number 56, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁴⁵ Eckerson to Ripley, 7 January 1863, Number 13, NARA OCO Letters Received.

From Depot to Arsenal

In his correspondence with Ripley, Eckerson noted, beginning in October 1862, that incoming correspondence from the Ordnance Department had changed the name of the post – it was now considered “Vancouver Arsenal” and would be so for the subsequent nineteen years.¹⁴⁶ This title change was appropriate; the years 1862 and 1863 were busy ones for the arsenal. In addition to construction activities, fabrications and repairs kept the detachment in work.

In April, Eckerson noted that “[a]rms, horse equipment, &c. are now repaired here, and the ammunition used by the troops in Oregon and Washington is fabricated at this post.”¹⁴⁷ In a letter to Ripley that August, Eckerson summarized the principal operations of the post for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1863.¹⁴⁸ Eschewing the traditional report form, Eckerson submitted the report in the text of a letter. He detailed the items fabricated and repaired at the post, other work done, and buildings and enclosures (see Appendix 4).

Eckerson’s account of construction activities sheds important light on the station’s buildings and grounds. The *Morning Oregonian*’s earlier rhetoric notwithstanding, the post’s major buildings – including its storehouse, magazine, officer’s quarters, office, outhouses, barracks, company kitchen, and brick shed – appear to have been completed before July 1, 1862, since Eckerson refers to the work done on these buildings during the fiscal year as repair or painting, not construction. Eckerson did detail the construction, between July 1, 1862 and June 30, 1863, of a forage shed, a well and well shed, a sentry- box near the storehouse, a flagstaff, 930 feet of 10 foot wide gravel road, 1,350 lineal feet of 4- foot wide gravel walkways, 900 lineal yards of picket fence built around the magazine, and 900 feet of barrier fence from the eastern to western boundaries of the arsenal grounds.¹⁴⁹

In contrast to the construction and activity of the arsenal grounds stood the twenty acre tract to the east, laid out by Ripley in 1858. Part of the disputed land claim of two citizens and intended as the site of the permanent brick magazine, it was, in reality, “a receptacle for filth and rubbish” littered with piles of 90,000 bricks. Eckerson, with the concurrence of the commander of Fort Vancouver,

¹⁴⁶ Eckerson to Ripley, 9 April 1863, Number 51, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ This is the only known Reoprt of Principal Operations known to exist for the post. This author believes that it was retained in the file of letters and not removed because Eckerson did not follow proper protocol and submit it on the required form. Since it was written as a traditional letter, it was either overlooked or consciously kept in the Department’s letter file, where this writer fortuitously found it.

¹⁴⁹ Eckerson to Ripley, 6 August 1863, Number 99, NARA OCO Letters Received.

proposed to Ripley that the tract be fenced into the rest of the arsenal enclosure, and submitted an estimate for 11,000 feet of picket lumber at a cost of \$800.¹⁵⁰

Increasing Wartime Demands

The fabrication of ammunition continued into 1864, increasing substantially. Employees at the arsenal produced a total of 282,900 small arms cartridges that year, including 132,900 elongated ball .574 caliber musket cartridges, 118,000 elongated ball .54 caliber rifle cartridges, and 32,000 Colt “N.M.” elongated ball cartridges (see Plate 15). Hinting at the post’s efficiency, Eckerson estimated that twelve operatives could fabricate 27,000 cartridges during a 60- hour week.¹⁵¹

Demands on the ordnance stores continued, despite the change of troops in the Pacific Northwest. The advent of the Civil War three years earlier precipitated the exodus of the majority of regular army units to posts outside the region. To fill the resulting gaps and support the remaining regulars, volunteer units were mustered in, and cavalry and infantry units from California, Oregon, and Washington territory supplemented the garrison at Fort Vancouver and other area posts. In comparison to the horrors of war in the East, the Washington D.C. establishment viewed the Department of the Pacific as exactly that – pacific. “[It] has been most signally exempt from the evils of civil war and consequently has enjoyed unexampled prosperity,” exclaimed the Secretary of War a year earlier, and the growing number of miners heading to the gold fields of eastern Washington Territory hoped this to be the case.¹⁵²

Arsenal Security & Copperhead Threats

The Pacific Northwest was far from a hotbed of pro- Union sentiment, though. A significant number of citizens shared the Confederacy’s pro- secession sentiment or identified with the Copperheads, a consortium of northern democrats and their supporters who opposed the war while nominally supporting the Union. This led San Francisco’s *Weekly Alta California* newspaper to report that:

Rebel sympathizers have made regular county societies throughout Oregon and Washington Territory, particularly in the mining districts. The *Portland Times* says a few of our citizens are inclined

¹⁵⁰ Eckerson to Ripley, 22 August 1863, Number 105, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁵¹ Thomas, 65.

¹⁵² Quoted in Ted Van Arsdol, *Northwest Bastion: The U.S. Army Barracks at Vancouver, 1849- 1916* (Vancouver, WA: Heritage Trust of Clark County, 1991), 22.

to be cast down by the results of the Fredricksburg battle and rebel sympathizers find a great deal to chuckle over.¹⁵³

The area's prosperity notwithstanding, the threat of public interests being seized in the Pacific Northwest – either by pro- Southern forces or a foreign power – was not considered an idle one by many in the field. Colonel Rene DeRussy, architect of many of the nation's coastal fortifications (including San Francisco Bay's Fort Point, another unit of the national park system), shared concerns about the security of the fortifications at the mouth of the Columbia River. He wrote to Brigadier General Joseph Totten, Chief of U.S. Engineers, supporting the requisition of General Benjamin Alvord, commanding the army's District of Oregon, for a battery of eight pieces of 10- pound rifled Parrott guns to be sent to Vancouver Arsenal. "There is no complete battery of Field Artillery in this District," Alvord explained. He also requested fifty heavy caliber artillery pieces - 200 pound Parrott guns – "to be placed in deposit at Vancouver Arsenal, to be ready to be used in the defence of this river in case of foreign war"¹⁵⁴

While the record is unclear whether or not the requested field artillery was approved – the heavy artillery request was not – the arsenal nonetheless remained the key repository for the region's ordnance and stores. This high visibility could also be a liability. According to published reports at the time, it was believed that secret societies with southern sympathies, including the Knights of the Golden Circle, had planned a general uprising to be triggered by the election of 1864. As with any uprising, arms and ammunition would be critical to success, and the arsenals at Benicia and Vancouver provided convenient central repositories. In a sensational account published after the fact, the *Portland Morning Oregonian* uncovered the details of a secret plot to break into the Vancouver Arsenal, purloin arms and ammunition, and render the remaining ordnance inoperable:

The plot was as follows: On the west side of the garrison is a row of stables, the armory or store house for arms is nearly a half mile to the east in an enclosure separated entirely from the garrison and guarded by one sentinel, the magazine is in the same enclosure but standing by itself, down on the flat toward the river and usually guarded by one sentinel. Within that enclosure there were not beside the sentinels, more than half a dozen men, usually,

¹⁵³ *Weekly Alta California*, 10 January 1853. Quoted in Van Arsdol, 22.

¹⁵⁴ Rene DeRussy, San Francisco, CA, to Joseph Totten, Washington D.C., 29 January 1864, Number 216, NARA OCO Letters Received. See enclosure for two letters from Alvord to Ramsay, dated 11 and 12 January 1864.

including Captain Eckerson, military storekeeper, and his clerks. The plot was to take forty picked men from the Portland encampments, under command of one of the Captains of the Guard, cross one or two at a time to the Columbia River opposite the ordnance grounds. When all were ready they were to cross at midnight to the east side of the river, landing opposite the magazine, thence to crawl up to the enclosure of the ordnance grounds, and wait for the concerted signal. Two trusty men were to go by way of the town *to the rear of the stables aforementioned* AND FIRE THEM a few minutes after the posting of the midnight sentinels and when the fire should be well under way, *to raise the greatest possible alarm, assisted by other confederates within the garrison.* This was expected to attract to the fire, every person in or about the ordnance grounds, except the sentinels. A couple of active men for each, were expected to gag them so as to prevent any outcry. In the first confusion of the alarm *the "captain" with his forty picked men were to spring onto the grounds, FORCE THE ARMORY TAKE WHAT ARMS THEY COULD CARRY AND HAUL WITH A TEAM ON HAND, SPIKE OR RENDER UNSERVICEABLE ALL THE REST, BLOW UP THE MAGAZINE, with a three minutes fuse, retreat to their flatboat, and go down the river a short distance to a point before selected and ENTRENCH.* The object was not really so much to *procure* arms as to DESTROY, SO THAT GEN ALVORD COULD NOT ARM THE CITIZENS OF OREGON.¹⁵⁵

According to the newspaper, the plan never came to fruition; one of the plotting members turned over the plans to the provost general, who, in turn, informed General Alvord. Learning that the secret was out, the raid was cancelled.

End of War Brings Change

By spring of 1865, the war ended, and the army commenced a general downsizing. The plethora of volunteers mustered out while the regular army discharged soldiers, reorganized, and reassigned units to garrison posts – including those in

¹⁵⁵ Portland *Morning Oregonian*, 25 May 1866. See Appendix 5 for the text of the article.

the west. The arsenal, too, was affected by downsizing; in June, Eckerson reported that he had “discharged all such employees as could be dispensed with,” including a blacksmith and six laborers “employed in transferring 360,000 bricks from front of Storehouse to new Shed.” He planned to discharge the laboratorian and suspend operations in the laboratory at the close of June. As a result of these reductions, Eckerson’s remaining staff was to include included one clerk, one carpenter, and one blacksmith/armorer.¹⁵⁶

Eckerson himself was soon to depart, too. At the end of May, Rufus Ingalls notified him of his appointment to a captaincy in the Quartermaster’s Department. He prepared for departure in September, and with his exit came a cessation in construction at the arsenal. In August, he wrote that:

no Annual Estimate of funds required at this Arsenal will be forwarded for the fiscal year ending June 30th 1866. The title to the Arsenal Site being in dispute, no permanent improvements can be made, and the repairs required upon temporary structures at the post will be unimportant.¹⁵⁷

Eckerson would remain in the army for another twenty years, and serve at posts in Idaho, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Montana before retiring to Portland, Oregon in 1885 at the rank of major. In his retirement, Eckerson published a compilation of his poetry, entitled “*When My Ship Comes In*” and *Other Rhymes of Camp and Hearth*, featuring such poems as “To My Old Musket”:

Goodby, old musket mine, good- by!
I leave thee not without a sigh,
For many a year we’ve passed together,
In sunshine and in stormy weather;
And though the parting wrings my heart,
Yet, old comrade, we must part.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Eckerson to A.B. Dyer, Washington D.C., 6 June 1865, Number 85, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁵⁷ Eckerson to Dyer, 25 August 1865, Number 103, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁵⁸ Theodore J. Eckerson, *When My Ship Comes In and Other Rhymes of Camp and Hearth* (Portland, OR: Press of F. W. Baltes & Company, 1891), 55.

Eckerson's Legacy

Eckerson's impact at the arsenal was a significant one. Not only had he served as the Ordnance Depot's first agent and military storekeeper beginning in 1853, he returned to command it during the Civil War years. Under Eckerson, the fabrication of small arms cartridges skyrocketed, to almost 300,000 by 1865. On his watch, the storehouse, magazine, officer's quarters, office, outhouses, barracks, company kitchen, and brick shed were repaired and, in some cases, painted. Known new construction included a laboratory, a shop building, a shed for building materials (possibly the brick shed above), a forage shed, a well and well shed, a sentry-box near the storehouse, a flagstaff, 930 feet of 10 foot wide gravel road, 1,350 lineal feet of 4 foot wide gravel walkways, 900 lineal yards of picket fence built around the magazine, and 900 feet of barrier fence from the eastern to western boundaries of the arsenal grounds.

Babbitt Assumes Command: 1865 to 1871

Eckerson's replacement as arsenal commander was another native of the Northeast. Massachusetts native Lawrence Sprague Babbitt came from a long line of army officers (Plate 16). His father, E.B. Babbitt, had also graduated from West Point and risen to the rank of general; his grandfather, Colonel Lawrence Sprague, commanded American forces during the War of 1812, and his great grandfather, Major E.B. Babbitt, commanded Connecticut troops at the siege of Louisbourg. (Ostensibly not one to eschew military service, his twin sister would eventually marry General George Weeks.)

Four years earlier, Babbitt had graduated from West Point and immediately distinguished himself in the battle of Bull Run, receiving a brevet rank for gallant and meritorious services with the Army of the Potomac. Later in 1861, Babbitt transferred from the artillery to the Ordnance Department, and by 1864 he was commanding the Louisville Ordnance Depot. Just months before his reassignment to Vancouver, Babbitt received a brevet captaincy for service to the Ordnance Department during the war. The twenty- six year old assumed command of the post on November 17, 1865, and soon became enmeshed in yet another controversy about land, buildings, and their control.

Block House Conflict

Under Eckerson's command, the Ordnance Department had accepted the management of the old post Block House in late 1862 (see Plate 14). By early 1865, General Alvord had asked to quarter the brigade band in the building, and Eckerson, thinking it was a request for temporary use, assented. By early February 1866, Babbitt found that he needed the facility, and wrote to Fort Vancouver's post commander, Major Marshall, requesting that it be vacated. Marshall balked, writing to his superiors in the department that the building was needed as quarters for laundresses. His commanding officer, Colonel Lovell, advised that the building belonged to the post of Fort Vancouver anyway, not the arsenal, and that it had only been "turned over temporarily" to the Ordnance Department. "The Ordnance Dept. can have no claim on the Block House," Lovell asserted, "and it will be considered as belonging to Fort Vancouver and at the disposal of the comdy officer of that post."¹⁵⁹

Babbitt strongly disagreed, noting that it physically sat within the lands set aside by General Ripley for the arsenal, and that the building had been greatly improved by the Ordnance Department. In response to Marshall's need, Babbitt

¹⁵⁹ W. Sanborn, Headquarters, Department of the Columbia, 14 February 1866, Endorsement to Number 56, NARA OCO Letters Received.

replied that “when there was a much larger command at fort Vancouver than is now there, this building was not needed and was not used as quarters.”¹⁶⁰ Unfortunately, the record is incomplete and the final determination of the building’s management is unclear; nevertheless, the incident does demonstrate the occasional friction and turf war between the two posts.

Squabbles with the neighboring post were not Babbitt’s only troubles. In August 1866, the commissioners of Clark County applied to Babbitt for permission to erect a new road through the heart of the arsenal grounds. They argued that the new road would shorten the distance of travel through the reserve and also avoid being “overflowed” by floods each summer. Babbitt countered that only 800 yards in distance would be saved, and that the area had only flooded once in the past eight years. Subsequently, he refused the request, but also forwarded it up to his superiors in Washington D.C., along with a small plat (see Plate 17).¹⁶¹ Further research may uncover whether or not this road was approved for construction; it appears to correspond with the Public Road in later maps (see Plate 18) but – interestingly – it also seems to align with the Public Road in the earlier 1859 Harney Map (see Plate 9).

The plat does provide additional information about the arsenal. Although abbreviated and showing only the lower, southern portion of the post’s grounds and buildings, it does identify the location of the Artillery Shed, Guard House, Magazine, Store House, Well, and picket and rail fences. As such it is one of the only known maps depicting the arsenal grounds in the 1860s.

Army Reorganization and its Affect

The year 1866 also ushered in big changes to the entire military reserve, including the fort and arsenal grounds. The Department of the Columbia’s headquarters, staff, and commissary stores announced their relocation to Portland, Oregon, despite the protestations of Washington’s state legislature.¹⁶² As a result, the reserve lost personnel, equipment, and a certain panache with the exeunt of the region’s most powerful military command. Contributing to this loss were the numerous companies of volunteers that were mustered out of service the same year. The army itself was in the throes of a major reorganization, driven, in part, by the end of the Civil War and the need for fewer troops in peacetime. Fort Vancouver became less essential as a garrisoned post, but its role – and that of its neighboring Vancouver Arsenal – as a supply depot remained important.

¹⁶⁰ Babbitt to Dyer, 23 June 1866. Number 56, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁶¹ Babbitt to Dyer, 11 August 1866. Number 70, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁶² Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, Volume 31: History of Washington, Idaho and Montana, 1845- 1889* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1890), 277.

In the summer of 1866, Babbitt sent to Washington D.C. his annual inventory of lands and buildings. Fortuitously, this report was retained with his cover letter, thus providing a rare glimpse of the facility. Babbitt records that the arsenal grounds included 163 total acres (valued at \$16,300), 20 of which were cleared and enclosed. The post included fourteen buildings; an Officers Quarters (a one story wood building valued at \$4000), Barracks (a one story wood building valued at \$3000), two Laundresses Quarters (one story wood buildings valued at \$250 each), a Storehouse (a two story wood building valued at \$5000), a Magazine (a one story wood building valued at \$2000), Workshops (a one story wood building valued at \$1100), a Laboratory (a one story wood building valued at \$780), an Office (a one story wood building valued at \$400), a Guard House (a one story wood building with a belfry, valued at \$500), a Bake House (a one story wood building valued at \$300), a Carriage- shed (a 100' x 30' shingled building valued at \$400), a Brick- shed (a 100' x 30' shingled building valued at \$600), a Well (with force pumps, valued at \$300), and a Stable (a one story wood building with a loft, valued at \$300). Babbitt listed the total value of the lands and buildings as \$35,480.¹⁶³

Along with this report, Babbitt also included a Statement of Property Procured and Issued at Vancouver Arsenal from July 1865 to June 30, 1866 (see Appendix 6). It noted the presence of more than a dozen different items, including 16,099 pounds of gunpowder, 928,266 small arms cartridges, 2,398 rounds of ammunition for field guns, 328,300 percussion caps, and 1784 friction primers (see Plate 19).¹⁶⁴

New Construction Proposed

By September, Babbitt was proposing new construction for the arsenal – a cistern for the Officers Quarters. With a moratorium still existing on the construction of permanent buildings, Babbitt argued that a new brick cistern – modeled on those placed “at each set of quarters in the garrison adjoining” – would not preclude such future construction. The cost would be less than \$150, and he had plenty of brick on hand. “If it is the intention of the Dept. ultimately to set up permanent buildings at this Arsenal,” Babbitt explained, “this cistern would still be in the right place, as the site now occupied for such is the only one upon which Officers Quarters should be built.”¹⁶⁵ Babbitt’s proposal was authorized shortly thereafter.

¹⁶³ Babbitt to Dyer, 17 August 1866, Number 78, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Babbitt to Dyer, 15 September 1866, Number 79, NARA OCO Letters Received.

The state of the temporary buildings – especially the commanding officer’s quarters – weighed heavily on Babbitt’s mind during the winter months. His family members soon became ill due to the cold and damp weather. “I with my family have been subjected to great discomfort,” he reported, “and have suffered from illness contracted in this insecure and half finished house.”¹⁶⁶ In January 1867, he was able to convene a Board of Officers to officially examine his quarters and report upon the needed repairs. The board described the house in detail, and recommended improvements totaling \$2,000:

[T]he House occupied by Capt. Babbitt was constructed in the year 1859, that it was built by standing planks on end, then battering the spaces between the planks, roofing, &c., that the house now is in a bad condition, the roof leaks where the portions of it come together, the rooms on the lower floor are very wet when it rains, from the rain coming through, and it is impossible from the bad condition of the planking and the battening to keep paper on the walls at all, the wind and rain removing it - And the Board are further of the opinion that in its present state the house is not one at all suited to this climate, nor can a family live in it without danger of contracting sickness. The board recommends that the outside be weather boarded, and the rooms below lathed and plastered – that the dining room roof be raised to the height of the lower part of the roof of the main house, thus preventing the winds from blowing in rain as is now the case – that the Kitchen be removed from its present place, and placed in rear of the dining room.¹⁶⁷

Destroyed by Fire

The recommendation appears to have been approved; by April, Babbitt reported that he had “made all preparations for repairing the house” and had moved his family and personal property into temporary quarters at Fort Vancouver. This was quite fortunate. At 2:00 a.m. in the early morning of April 21, a fire totally destroyed the building. Babbitt believed the fire to be the “work of an incendiary.” “I was absent in Portland purchasing supplies at the time of the fire,”

¹⁶⁶ Babbitt to Dyer, 29 January 1867, Number 16, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁶⁷ Enclosure 1, Proceedings of a Board of Officers, Babbitt to Dyer, 29 January 1867, Number 16, NARA OCO Letters Received.

he related, “but I am satisfied that everything was done that could be done to save the property in question. The prompt action of the Civil & Military fire Companies, alone saved other buildings in the vicinity.”¹⁶⁸

Babbitt immediately telegraphed the Chief of Ordnance, Alexander B. Dyer in Washington D.C., asking for authority to rebuild (see Plate 20). In a subsequent letter, Babbitt hinted at his desire to rebuild a more permanent building. He noted that there was plenty of brick on hand, and he had consulted with carpenters and brick masons in Vancouver who helped him develop an estimate of \$5000 for a more permanent structure. In a return telegram, Dyer directed Babbitt to arrange for temporary quarters in the garrison at Fort Vancouver, but did not address the issue of rebuilding.

Three months after the fire, Babbitt had still not received any direction. Writing to Dyer, he feared that instructions may have been lost on the overland mail route, and he worried that he might not be able to rebuild before the approaching rainy season. In response, Dyer explained that permanent quarters would be built at the arsenal “as soon as practicable,” but implied that the question of title to the arsenal’s land was still unresolved. He instructed Babbitt in the mean time to establish temporary quarters and consider converting one of the existing post buildings. Babbitt protested, noting the essential nature of the post’s buildings and the similar cost of both temporary and permanent construction.¹⁶⁹ Babbitt’s correspondence picks up again a year later, in July 1868, when he sends a formal estimate for \$5,000 for the erection of one set of Officers Quarters. The estimate is not clear, but its reference to carpenter work and equipment – and the lack of reference to any bricks or masonry work – suggests that this was a temporary building.¹⁷⁰

Lingering Land Claim Issues

As with his predecessors, the issue of title to the lands comprising the arsenal thwarted many of Babbitt’s plans for permanent construction and expansion. By the summer of 1868, he focused his efforts on sorting out the various land claims in hopes of facilitating a resolution to the lingering issue. He identified one claim that he felt could be made good against the government – the claim of William Ryan for a small 5 68/100 acre triangle at the northeast corner of the enclosed portion of the reserve – and found Ryan willing to relinquish it to the government for \$500. Within this triangle were several arsenal buildings, including two sets of

¹⁶⁸ Babbitt to Dyer, 23 April 1867, Number 34, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁶⁹ Babbitt to Dyer, 24 July 1867, Number 45, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁷⁰ Babbitt to Dyer, 17 July 1868, Number 37, NARA OCO Letters Received.

laundresses quarters and the greater portion of the company quarters. Babbitt was not expecting any relevant findings from the joint commission investigating the claims of the Hudson's Bay Company, reporting that they "never had a building or other improvements upon what is now known as the Ordnance Reserve."¹⁷¹

Despite lingering land claim issues, the relevance and permanence of the arsenal was soon to be supported – but at the cost of its neighboring post. Major General George Crook, fresh from military successes in eastern Oregon and settling in as the new commander of the Department of the Columbia, recommended in 1869 that Fort Vancouver be closed as a military post and its lands opened for public settlement. Interestingly, he recommended that the army retain the Vancouver Arsenal. Crook's superior officer, Major General George H. Thomas, supported Crook's recommendation. This sent shockwaves through the community of Vancouver. In a remarkable twist, Thomas died in March 1870, and Major General John M. Schofield assumed command of the Military Division of the Pacific. In turn, Crook was subsequently replaced at the department level by General E.R.S. Canby. Schofield and Canby seemed less inclined to close Fort Vancouver, and upon accompanying the army's general-in-chief, William T. Sherman, on an inspection of the post in September of 1870, soon reversed Thomas' orders.¹⁷²

During this period of uncertainty for the fort, Babbitt continued his operations at the arsenal. By April 1871, though, Babbitt was reassigned to the command of the St. Louis Arsenal. He would serve in that capacity until 1876, when he returned to Vancouver as the Chief Ordnance Officer for Department of the Columbia. In this capacity, he saw action in the 1877 Nez Perce campaign and the Bannock War of 1878. By 1879, Babbitt would achieve the rank of major and assume command of the Fort Monroe Arsenal until 1887, when he would relocate to San Antonio as the commander of its arsenal. Babbitt retired to Dover, New Jersey, where died in 1903 from acute nephritis after a three year illness. Babbitt's son attended West Point in 1880, graduating in 1884 and joining the Ordnance Department. At the time of Babbitt's death his was one of only three families that could boast three successive generations of West Point graduates.¹⁷³

Babbitt's Legacy

Babbitt left an important legacy at the site. Although his years in charge saw less activity than previous ones, during his tenure at least three new buildings seem to

¹⁷¹ Babbitt to Dyer, 4 May 1868, Number 28, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁷² Van Arsdol, 31- 3.

¹⁷³ "Col. Lawrence S. Babbitt Dead," *New York Times*, 17 October 1903. Powell, 28.

have been erected, including two laundress quarters and a stable. Babbitt tried, unsuccessfully, to initiate permanent construction at the arsenal, but he did delve into the land claim issues that so hamstrung previous efforts. He also produced a rough plat that serves as one of the few maps of the arsenal grounds during the era.

Kress Commands the Arsenal, 1871 to 1881

Babbitt's successor, First Lieutenant John A. Kress, assumed command of the post on April 21, 1871 (see Plate 21). Thirteen years earlier, Kress, a Pennsylvania native, had gained admission to the U.S. Military Academy from LaPorte, Indiana. Although ranked fifth in his class at West Point, he resigned on October 29, 1861 – prior to graduation – and joined the staff of Brigadier General James S. Wadsworth as a lieutenant and aide. “Like any aide,” explained one historian, “his duties would run the gamut, the most important of which now were instruction, drill, and discipline of the still- green soldiers” at the advent of the Civil War.¹⁷⁴

Kress rose to a lieutenant colonelcy and commanded volunteers at several notable battles, including Chancellorsville and Gettysburg. Following the latter, Wadsworth nominated Kress to a position in the regular army's Ordnance Department.¹⁷⁵ After assignments at the Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois and the Pittsburgh Arsenal in Pennsylvania, Kress was ordered to Vancouver to assume command of the arsenal in the spring of 1871. In his memoirs, Kress recalled the scene:

The buildings consisted of one large two story house, one powder magazine one story high, one two story barrack building for the detachment of 30 Ordnance enlisted men, two or three cottages for married non-commissioned officers, and a small office building with two rooms. The commanding officer resided in one of the old log cabins in the Post of Fort Vancouver. A picket fence separated the Arsenal 160 acres from the part of the reservation assigned to the fort. About fifty officers lived at the Post [Fort Vancouver], many of them had families and social intercourse was lively and harmonious.¹⁷⁶

Shortly after his arrival, Kress received funding – in the form of a \$2,500 appropriation – for new construction. He oversaw the building of “a comfortable two story cottage, with small barn, woodshed, etc.” where “with much satisfaction” he and his family would live for nearly eleven years (see Plates 26 & 27). Presumably, this was the temporary structure that Babbitt had sought to replace his burned quarters. Kress welcomed the new quarters, preferring them over the log quarters of the fort:

¹⁷⁴ Wayne Mahood, *General Wadsworth: The Life and Times of Brevet Major General James S. Wadsworth* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 70.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 163, 197- 8.

¹⁷⁶ Kress, 35.

The old log cabins we had been occupying were good enough habitations, with their huge fire places for big blazing and snapping fir logs, and broad halls; but it was unpleasant to be awakened at night by hearing little pattering hoofs of skunks, on the attic stairways of the big halls.¹⁷⁷

Kress also sought and received approval for the construction of a new barracks building for the post's enlisted men at a cost not to exceed \$2,500.¹⁷⁸ The following year, he received an additional appropriation in the amount of \$1,000 for repairing the storehouses, workshops, quarters, barracks, fences, and grounds.¹⁷⁹ However, Dyer did not support Kress' initial proposal for use of these funds, referring vaguely to "the settled policy of the Dept. in respect to the Vancouver Arsenal."¹⁸⁰ This policy is not articulated, but one may speculate that it involved the moratorium on permanent structures. Kress did articulate at least one of his improvements. "The artillery shed lately enclosed and repaired," he explained "will make an excellent shop: it is 100' x 30', well lighted and conveniently located" (see Plate 25).¹⁸¹

Challenge and Conflict

Shortly after his arrival, the War Department also assigned Kress to be the Chief Ordnance Officer for the Department of the Columbia, and later, in 1880, he would become General Nelson A. Miles' assistant inspector general. Like several of his predecessors, Kress recognized the challenges that the command of the arsenal presented:

As Arsenal commander the nearest superior to whom I owed allegiance was the Chief of Ordnance in Washington D.C. and, as far as he was concerned, I felt almost as independent as a hog on ice, but the

¹⁷⁷ Kress, 36.

¹⁷⁸ Dyer to Commanding Officer, Vancouver Arsenal, 26 October 1871, Page 265, Volume 38, NARA OCO Letters Sent.

¹⁷⁹ Dyer to Commanding Officer, Vancouver Arsenal, 22 June 1872, Page 285, Volume 39, NARA OCO Letters Sent.

¹⁸⁰ Dyer to Commanding Officer, Vancouver Arsenal, 23 July 1872, Page 378, Volume 39, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁸¹ John A. Kress, Vancouver Arsenal, to Dyer, 9 February 1872, Number 915, NARA OCO Letters Received.

Department commander had a vice- like grip on me through the two of his staff positions I held.”¹⁸²

Within the first year of his arrival, Kress outfitted a major expedition. In 1872, Troops from Fort Vancouver and California posts responded to the Klamath basin where the Modoc War had begun. Kress supplied the former with supplies, arms, and ammunition – including the “new patent American needle- guns” – but remained in Vancouver.¹⁸³

That same year, he reported the post’s principal operations for the preceding fiscal year. In addition to the building of officer’s quarters and new enlisted men’s barracks, the principal storehouse had been raised, repainted, and repaired; the magazine had been raised and repainted; the artillery shed had been enclosed, repaired, floored, and painted; the guard house and office had been repaired, whitewashed, and painted; the Clerk’s Quarters, two sets of Laundress’ Quarters, Dining Room and Kitchen for the Barracks, and Barn were all whitewashed; 4,000 feet of picket fence and the post’s sheds and outbuildings were whitewashed; a new flagstaff was made and raised; the stores were partly overhauled and cleaned; and 933 feet of iron water pipe were laid.¹⁸⁴ For the next several years, Vancouver Arsenal was allotted \$1,000 annually for repairs, to be directed to those “absolutely necessary to preserve the public property.”¹⁸⁵ In 1873, Kress was able to construct an ice house on the post grounds with excess funds, and the following year he was able to complete work on a shed and the office and its porch, with \$100 remaining for construction of a rough picket fence.¹⁸⁶

A map of the military reserve, created in 1874 (the same year that Kress became a captain), provides a detailed look at the arsenal during this period (see Plates 18 & 25). It names eighteen buildings on the post and provides a good overview of the buildings’ layout and their relation to the neighboring Fort Vancouver post.

In 1877, Kress outfitted General O.O. Howard’s campaign against the Nez Perce. Stretching across the Rocky Mountains and into Montana, Kress provided a battery of mountain howitzers and four Gatling guns. “I believe this was the first time a full battery of Gatlings, or other machine guns, was ever used in battle,” recalled Kress.¹⁸⁷ Again, Kress provided the arms and ammunition but remained on the post. In 1878, this changed.

¹⁸² Kress, 36- 7.

¹⁸³ VanArsdol, 36.

¹⁸⁴ Kress to Dyer, 8 July 1872, Number 3523, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁸⁵ Dyer to Commanding Officer, Vancouver Arsenal, 15 May 1873, Page 9, Volume 41, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁸⁶ Dyer to Commanding Officer, Vancouver Arsenal, 13 May 1874, Page 168, Volume 43, NARA OCO Letters Received.

¹⁸⁷ Kress, 38.

The Bannock and Paiute War

That year, the conflict dubbed the Bannock and Paiute War erupted near the headwaters of the Snake River, and Howard responded, following members of these tribes into the Blue Mountains and east into Idaho. Fearing their escape, Howard telegraphed Vancouver asking for support. General Alfred Sully, with only a handful of troops, was unable to help, so Kress took the initiative. According to his account, he gathered a motley crew of ten ordnance men and ten bandsmen, and appropriated 50 extra rifles, a Gatling gun, ammunition and provisions. The *ad hoc* assemblage next liberated the large river steamer *Spokane* from the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company and proceeded upriver. Kress was soon joined by Washington Territory's governor, who procured 43 additional volunteers for what was being called the "gun-boat campaign."¹⁸⁸

The detachment patrolled the river in earnest; on July 8, seventy miles above The Dalles, they noticed a large group of canoes accompanied by several swimming horses and a small number of unidentified Indians. Without evidence that this group was hostile or actually connected to those pursued by Howard, under Kress' command his soldiers opened fire with the Gatling gun, captured many of the horses, and kept the majority from crossing to the north side of the river. Kress would later, in 1925, be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross from President Calvin Coolidge for extraordinary heroism in action in 1878. "By his gallant and fearless leadership in patrolling the Columbia River," the commendation read, "[he] was successful in five attacks upon the Indians, from both land and from the river, succeeded in capturing and killing their horses, destroyed their boats, arms and ammunition and camp equipage, thus frustration their plan of spreading war among the Indians to the north."¹⁸⁹

Return of the Department Headquarters

In 1878, U.S. Army reorganization –represented in the region by a major decision regarding the Department of the Columbia –heralded the end of the Vancouver Arsenal. Rather than remain in Portland, the department headquarters returned to the military reserve where it had been housed prior to 1866. With the Indian Wars largely finished and the demand for ordnance in the Pacific Northwest

¹⁸⁸ Kress, 40-1.

¹⁸⁹ Kress, 43. Reports at the time – as well as modern- day research – suggest that the "skirmishes" may have been much less fierce and heroic than reported. See Michael McKenzie, "To the Brink and Back: The Bannock War Pounds at the Door to Washington Territory," *Columbia: The Magazine of Northwest History* (Summer 2008), 21.

waning, the arsenal was bordering on obsolescence. Army staff saw the writing on the wall, and they began to craft a new role for the grounds of the arsenal. No longer would it be physically divided from the neighboring fort, renamed Vancouver Barracks in 1879; the garrison's Officers' Row would be expanded west and also east through the arsenal grounds, and the new Headquarters for the Department of the Columbia would be placed on the eastern boundary of the military reserve – in the immediate vicinity of the arsenal's storehouses – with new roadways, landscaping and buildings that united the grounds of the barracks and arsenal into one seamless military reserve.

Rough plans suggest that the army sought to reuse or adapt as many of the arsenal's buildings as possible. Designs show how one building – a two story “Temporary Barracks” and itself possibly a converted ordnance storehouse – was to be converted into the department's new headquarters building (see Plate 22). New construction also commenced, leading the *Portland Oregonian* to report in May 1880 that “a new set of quarters is being erected in the arsenal grounds” at the post.¹⁹⁰

Kress continued to serve as the arsenal's commanding officer, but his role soon expanded:

About 1880, Major General O. O. Howard was relieved from the command of the Department of the Columbia, and Major General Nelson A. Miles was assigned to that command. During the two years I served on his staff, as Chief Ordnance Officer of the Department and as Assistant Inspector General, in addition to being commanding officer of the Vancouver Arsenal, my official quiver was well supplied with arrows, I believe I was the busiest all-around man, on the staff.¹⁹¹

In 1880, the post employed fifteen men onsite: one commanding officer, one ordnance clerk, one ordnance sergeant, one carpenter, and eleven soldiers (see Appendix 8). Unlike many posts, six of these employees (40%) lived on the post grounds with their families. On the arsenal grounds, seven buildings functioned as living quarters in 1880, with six occupied by employees and their families and one serving as a barracks (see plate 27). Kress, his wife Lydia, sons Theodore and William, and daughters Marian, Nellie, and Fanny lived in the post commander's house (see Plate 26). Nearby, Horace Kress, an ordnance clerk and possibly an elder brother of the post commander, lived with his wife Julia, daughter Jenni and

¹⁹⁰ *Vancouver Independent*, 21 May 1880.

¹⁹¹ Kress, 45.

son Benjamin. Michael O'Connell, the post's ordnance sergeant, also lived nearby with his wife Ellen. The lone barracks building housed carpenter Paul Weidlich and soldiers John McKennon, Albert Thomlinson, Joseph Mason, Thomas Butler, William Waterman, Jacob McIrvin, Zachary Lane, and Michael Michaelson. In another family quarters lived William Arnold, his wife Julia, and their children Kate, James, and George. The last two family quarters housed the Brogan family (Francis, his wife Mary, and their daughter Frances), and the Williams family (Robert, his wife Elizabeth, and their children Mary, Charles, Agnes, and Arthur) respectively.¹⁹²

Despite this complement of personnel, by late 1881 the Headquarters of the Army articulated its official decision regarding the arsenal. General Orders No. 89, issued on December 14, 1881, discontinued the Vancouver Arsenal and established the Vancouver Barracks Ordnance Depot.

By the direction of the Secretary of War the arsenal at Vancouver, Washington Territory, is discontinued, and the buildings and grounds pertaining thereto will be turned over to the Quartermaster's Department for the use of the line of the army, as a part of the post at Vancouver Barracks.

An ordnance depot, as provided for in par. 2516 of the Regulations will be established at Vancouver Barracks.

The Chief of Ordnance will give the necessary instructions.

By command of Gen. Sherman: R.C. Drum, Adjutant General.¹⁹³

Word of this decision did not reach Vancouver for several weeks, and much speculation ensued. "Nothing official has been received at headquarters," noted the *Vancouver Independent* in early January 1882, "concerning the alleged removal of the Vancouver Arsenal."¹⁹⁴ Twelve days later, the same newspaper confirmed the existence of an order for the discontinuance of the arsenal, but added that it

¹⁹² United States Bureau of the Census, Tenth Census of the United States, Washington Territory, Clarke County, Vancouver City District 3, Ordnance Department – Vancouver Barracks, 14 June 1880.

¹⁹³ Quoted in *Vancouver Independent*, 26 January 1882.

¹⁹⁴ *Vancouver Independent*, 5 January 1882.

had not yet been received in Vancouver. The newspaper also reprinted an item from the *Army and Navy Journal*:

The Arsenal at Vancouver, Washington Territory, hitherto occupied by the Ordnance Department, is soon to be turned over to the Department Commander for use of troops, and will be a valuable addition to the present Vancouver Barracks, which have scarcely afforded sufficient room for the usual garrison and the Department Headquarters with its attendant staff, clerks, etc., added.¹⁹⁵

“Vancouver Arsenal as an arsenal is a thing of the past,” the *Independent* reported one week later. “It is now officially announced as Vancouver Barracks Ordnance Depot. . . . Some of the buildings have already been transferred to the Quartermaster’s Department, and the transfer will be completed when the stores to be sent away are forwarded.”¹⁹⁶ Kress was soon directed to retain any serviceable stores and send any others to the Benicia Arsenal. He also forwarded “to Olympia the arms and munitions belonging to Washington Territory, consisting of 478 Springfield rifles and 15,000 cartridges.”¹⁹⁷ “The work of dismantling the old Vancouver Arsenal is proceeding rapidly,” remarked the *Independent* in mid- February 1882, “and the stores are being shipped at a lively rate.”¹⁹⁸

The new facility to be established – Vancouver Barracks Ordnance Depot – was envisioned to “concentrate a supply of Ordnance stores for the use of the Department of Columbia.” As such, it would cease to be an independent command of the Ordnance Department, and no longer have a commanding officer who reported to the Chief of Ordnance in Washington D.C.¹⁹⁹

Kress’ Legacy

Kress would be the Vancouver Arsenal’s final commanding officer. Shortly thereafter, on May 2, 1882, the War Department reassigned Kress to the command of the San Antonio Arsenal in Texas. After eighteen months, he relocated to the Indianapolis Arsenal, and in 1884 he again transferred, this time

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 19 January 1882.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 26 January 1882.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 2 February 1882. Also see *Portland Oregonian*, 26 January 1882.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 16 February 1882.

¹⁹⁹ Benet, Washington, D.C., to Kress, 7 January 1882, Page 453, Volume 60, NARA OCO Letters Received.

to the St. Louis Powder Depot. Additional reassignments over the next few years landed him at the Benicia Arsenal, Rock Island Arsenal, and back to the St. Louis Powder Depot. Kress also served a stint as Chief Ordnance Officer for generals Wilson and Brooke during the Spanish American War. On August 17, 1903, Kress retired at the rank of brigadier general, living in St. Louis, Honolulu, Samoa, and Philadelphia prior to his death.²⁰⁰ His eleven year tenure at Vancouver Arsenal saw many changes, as the post grew to its largest size, with more than a dozen buildings, and then virtually disappeared as the military reserve became more open and the differentiation between fort and arsenal was removed.

²⁰⁰ Kress, 46- 8.

Aftermath

Created by the same order that discontinued the arsenal, the Vancouver Barracks Ordnance Depot served the post's ordnance needs for more than a decade until the War Department discontinued it in on September 30, 1894.²⁰¹ With a maximum of seven employees in the earlier years of its existence to just one at its closure, evidence suggests that the pared-down depot functioned out of buildings in the southwestern section of the post, in the vicinity of the wharf. It is clear that the depot did not remain on the site of the arsenal, for work had begun in earnest on the establishment of the new departmental buildings on the former arsenal grounds by 1882. "The work of reconstructing the old ordinance [sic] storehouse to adapt it to use as a department headquarter [sic] building will be shortly commenced and pushed forward," noted the *Vancouver Independent*, "with all the vigor that the limited means available will admit of."²⁰²

By 1886, the redesign of the eastern end of the military reserve had come to fruition. Maps show that six new buildings – including the one now known as the Marshall House – had been erected through the former arsenal grounds, extending the look of the Officers' Row, and the roadway today known as Evergreen Boulevard had been extended and curved south to provide access to the new department headquarters building located almost directly between the footprints of two Storehouses (see Plates 23 & 24)²⁰³. The arsenal's officer's quarters, stables, and enlisted quarters appear to still exist to the north of the new extension of Officers' Row, but the buildings to the south appear to have been demolished, converted, or moved. One building falling in the latter category was the guard house. By 1886, this building had been relocated to the southwest of the new department headquarters (see Plate 24).

By 1891, maps indicate that the post's Ordnance Depot had relocated to a building on the Columbia River waterfront – an understandable move, perhaps, and probably not too far from the site of the army's first cannon salute in 1849.

²⁰¹ Post Returns, September & October 1894, NARA Microfilm. According to subsequent post returns, the depot's commanding officers included Cpt. Cullen Bryant (June 1882 to December 1884), Lt. A.H. Russell (December 1884 to August 1887), Cpt. W.S. Starring (August 1887 until his death on 12 February 1889 of dropsy caused by cirrhosis of the liver), Lt. Charles H. Clark (May 1889 to July 1893), and Cpt. Henry E. Robinson (July 1893 to September 1894).

²⁰² *Vancouver Independent*, 30 March 1882.

²⁰³ For more information, see Eric B. Gleason and Douglas C. Wilson, *Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, Vancouver, Washington: Archaeological Investigations of the Children's Play Structure* (Vancouver, WA: National Park Service, 2004).

Plates

Plate 1

Uniform buttons from Ordnance Corps. National Archives.

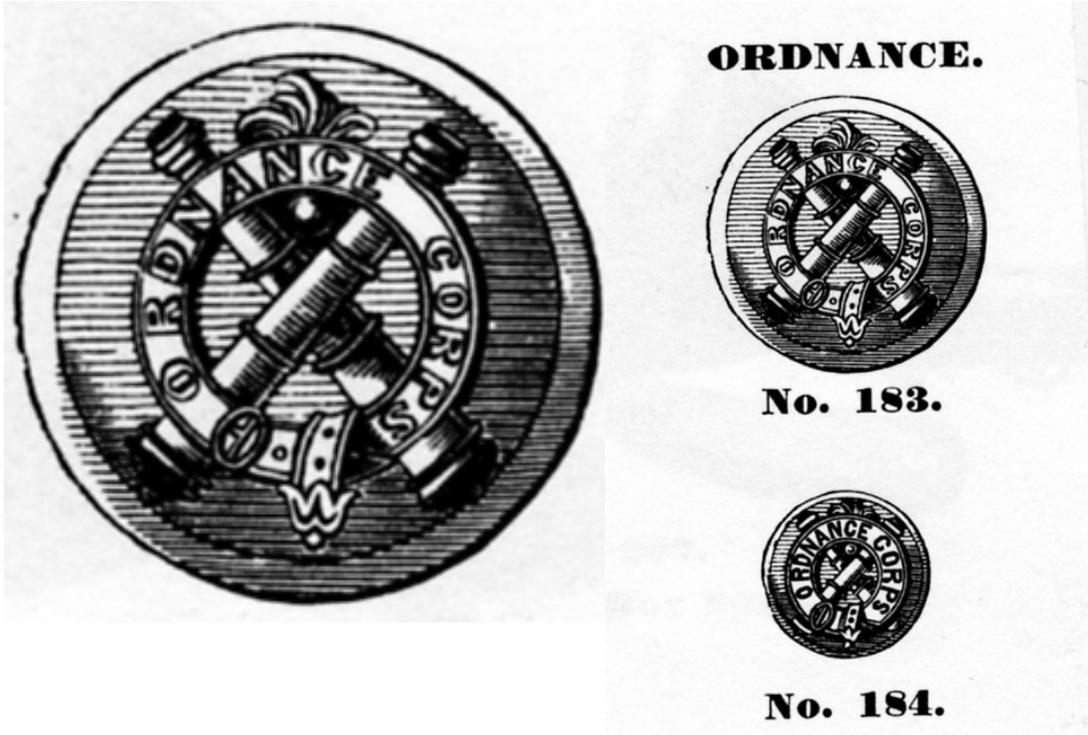


Plate 2

Image of First Lieutenant Theodore Talbot while serving at Fort Sumter, 1861. Talbot is in the top row on the far right. *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War*, p 25.



Plate 3

Theodore J. Eckerson retired at the rank of major in 1885. After retirement, he lived for many years in Portland, Oregon, where he published a volume of poetry in 1891. OHS neg., OrHi 74893



Plate 4

Detail showing soldiers from Battery C, Third U.S. Artillery, in formation at Fort Vancouver. The building in the center of the background was the school house rented from the HBC for use as an Ordnance Storehouse. Image III SC 89759, National Archives.



Plate 5

Image of U.S. Arsenal Notice from the *Portland Morning Oregonian*, 6 February 1858. Multnomah County Library.

U. S. Arsenal Notice.
PROPOSALS WILL BE RECEIVED BY
the undersigned at his office at Fort Vancouver
W T, until February 10th 1858 for furnishing the
following building materials for the use of the U S
Arsenal, to be erected at that place, viz
400 000 Brick
450 lineal feet of Rock dressed, viz bedded,
jointed and edged for laying,
300 cubic yards of stone for foundations
200 barrels of Lime,
50 barrels of Cement
The Stone, Brick &c, must be of the best quality to
be approved by competent judges and at the same time
the materials delivered by the 31st day of March,
1858
Proposals will be entertained for the whole or por-
tions of the amount required and to be delivered either
on the building site or at the Government Wharf at
Fort Vancouver, the former will be preferred.
THEODORE T FCKEYSON,
Military Storekeeper, U S A
In charge

U. S. Ordnance Depot
Vancouver, W T Jan 22d 1858

Plate 6

Image of Joshua Woodrow Sill as a brigadier general during the Civil War.
Library of Congress.



Plate 7

Detail from Mansfield's Inspection Report, 1858. Note the building labeled "Ordnance Store & Office" in the center, the "magazine" just to its north, and the twenty acre addition labeled "Ordnance Site" just above the map's legend. This addition was presumably the one laid out by James W. Ripley earlier in 1858. National Archives.

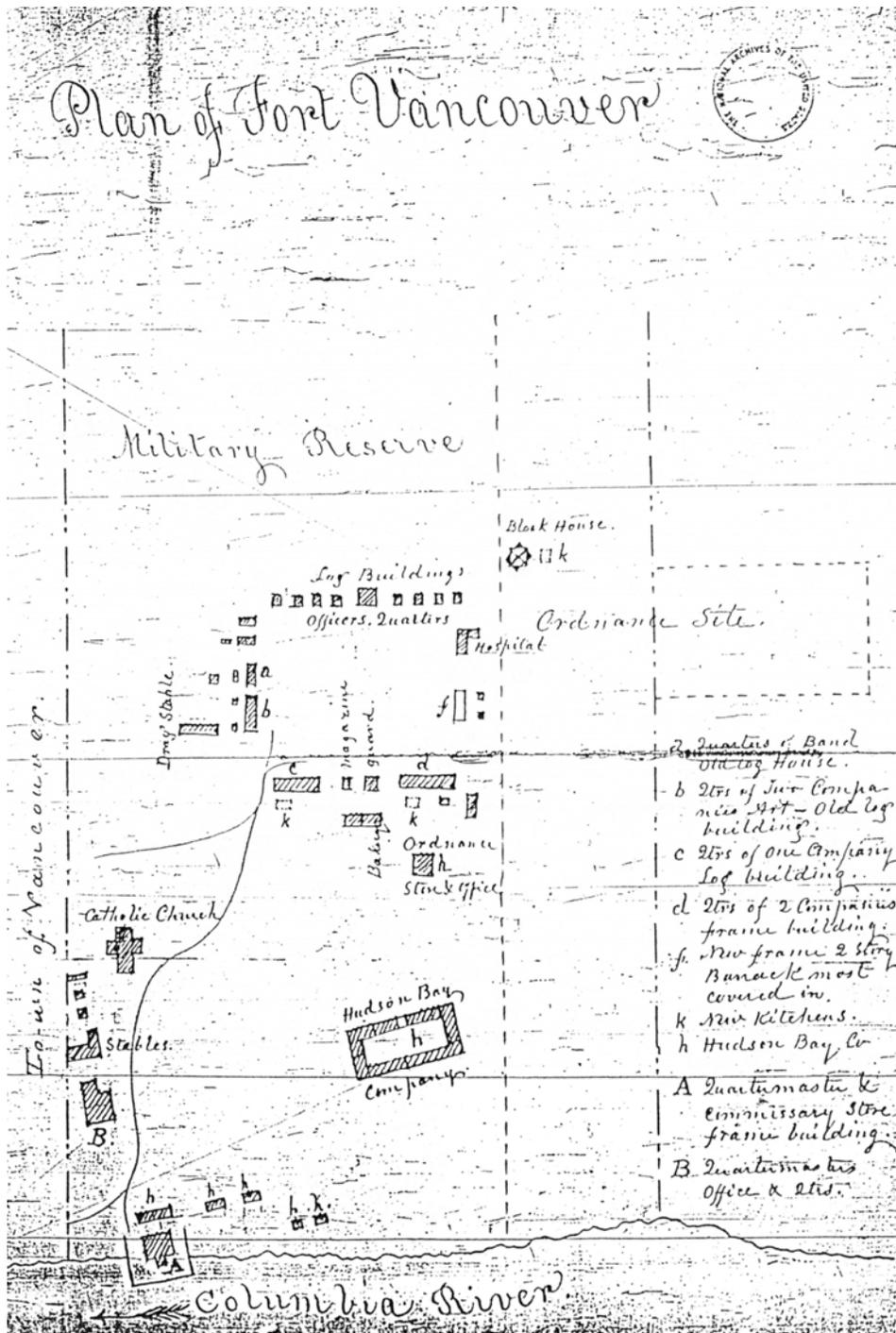


Plate 8

Minie ball found on the site of the Vancouver Arsenal by NPS archaeologists in 2004 while excavating near the site of one of the arsenal's storehouses. NPS Photo.



Plate 9

A map of the military reservation made by order of General Harney in 1859. Note the large Ordnance Reserve tract to the east. National Archives.

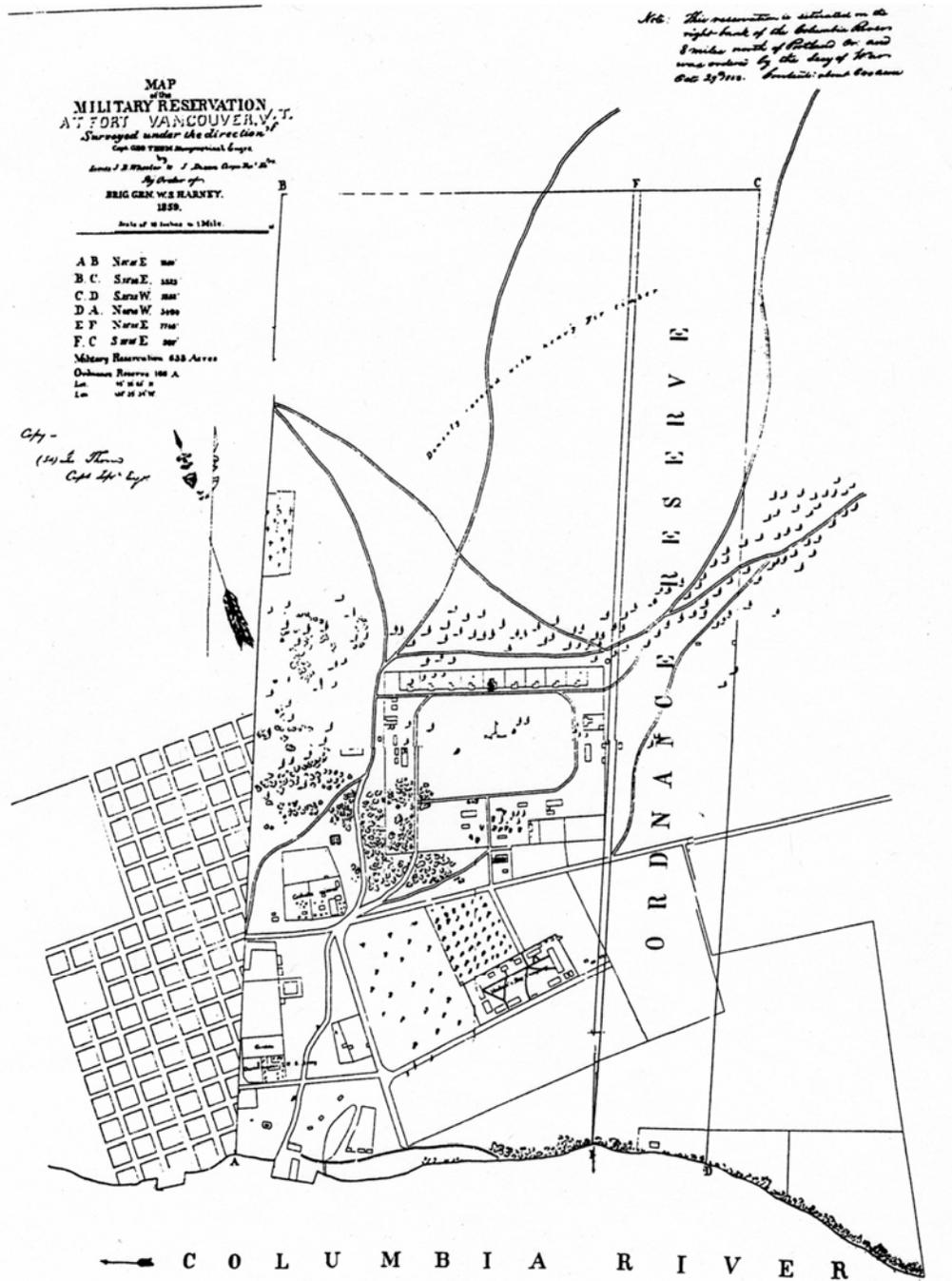
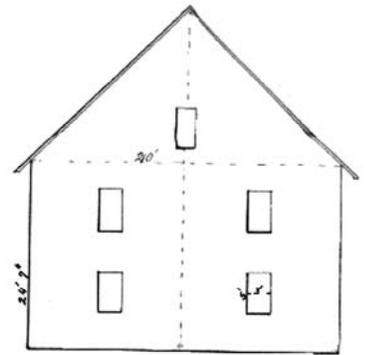
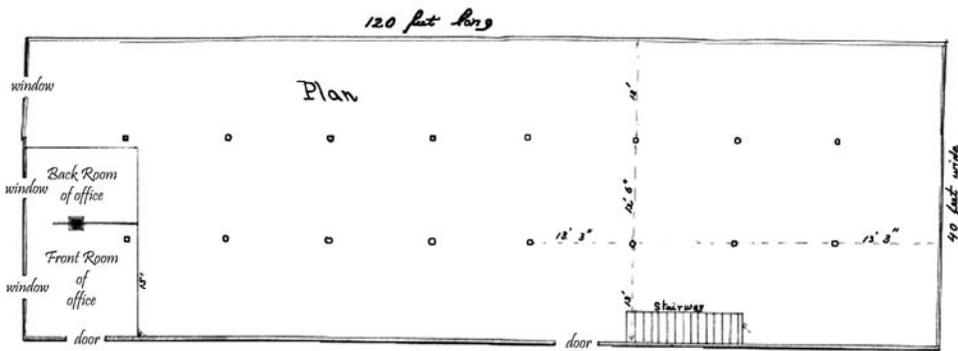


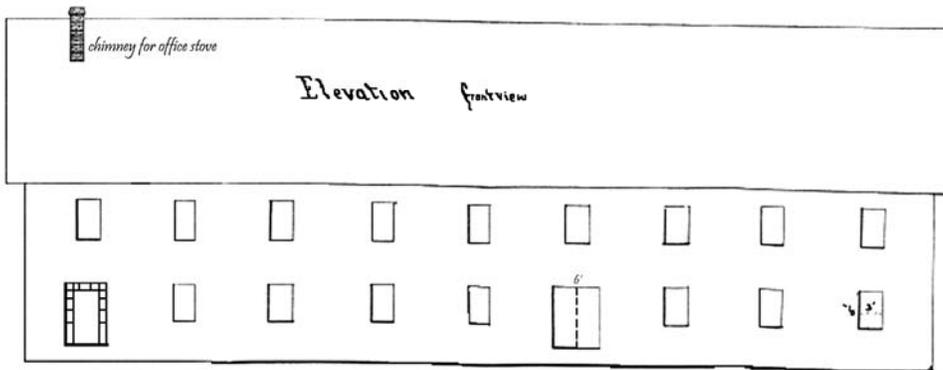
Plate 10

Welcker's plans for a Temporary Store House, 1860. National Archives.

Temporary Store House at Vancouver Depot



End View

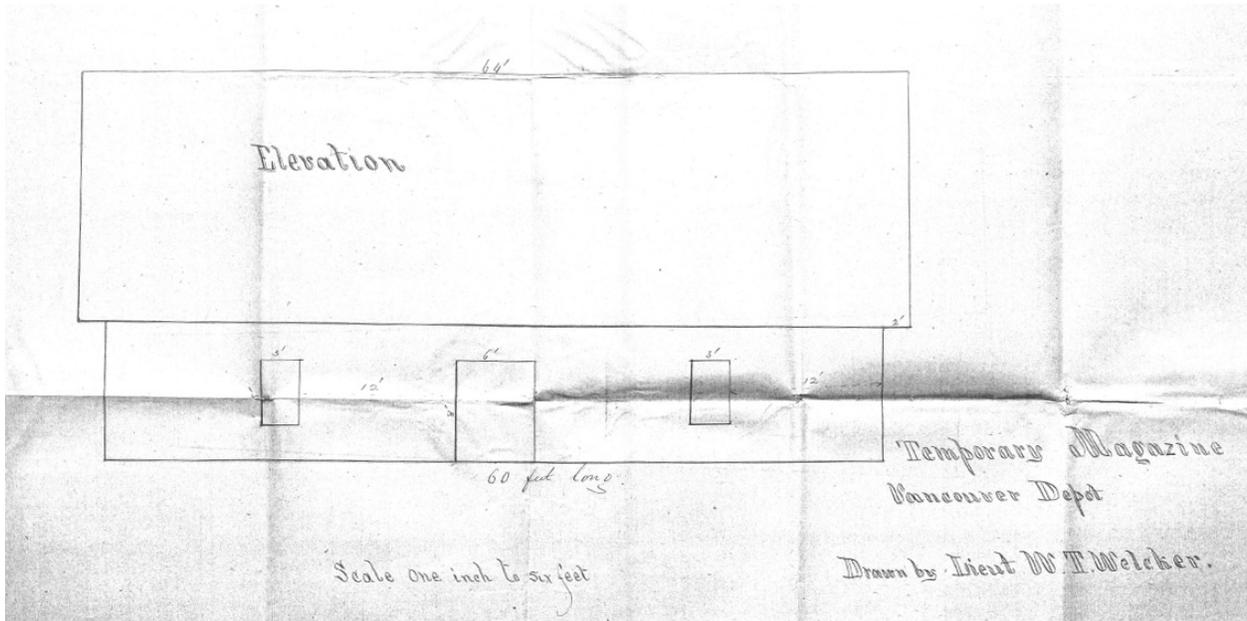


Drawn by Lieut W^m T. Welcker
November 16th 1860

Scale of one inch to ten feet

Plate 11

Welcker's plans for a Temporary Magazine, 1860. National Archives.



Temporary Magazine at Vancouver Depot
Drawn by Lieut W. T. Welcker

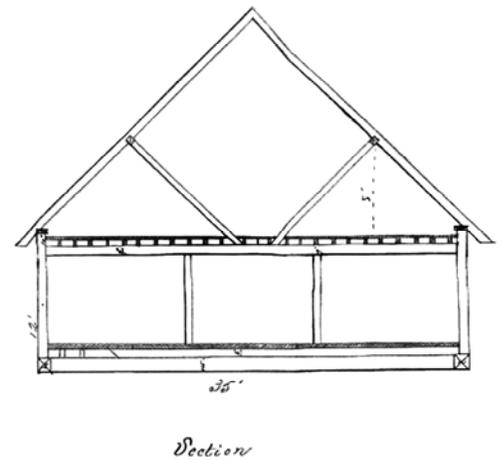
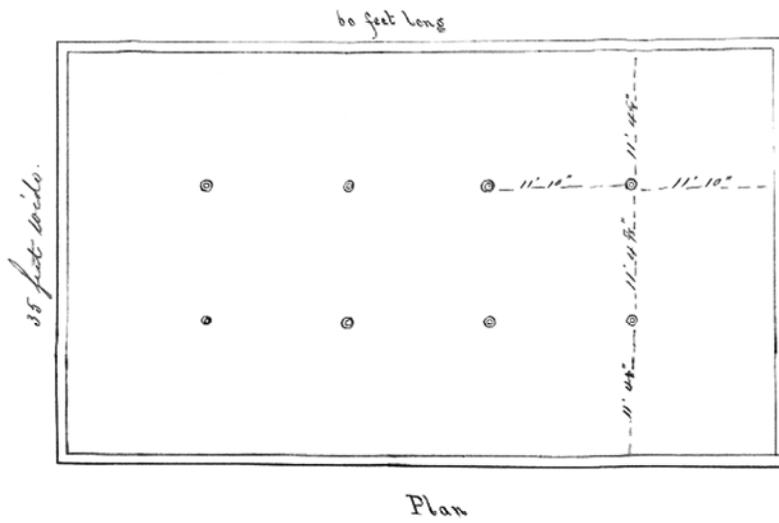
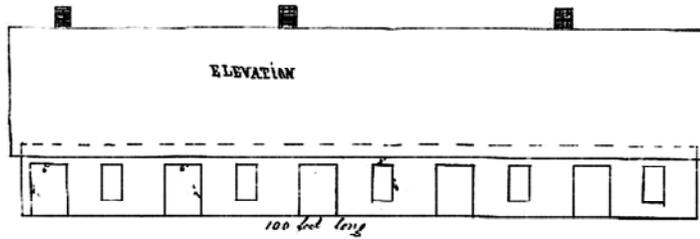


Plate 12

Welcker's plans for a Temporary Work Shop and Laboratory, 1861. National Archives.

TEMPORARY WORK SHOPS AT VANCOUVER DEPOT

L302 171



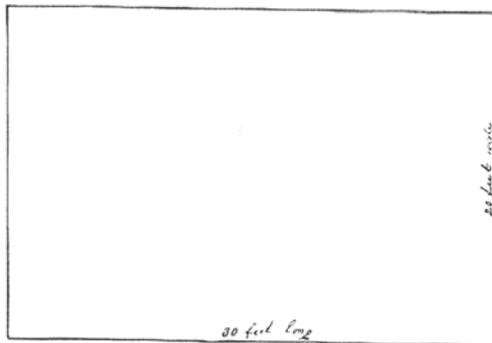
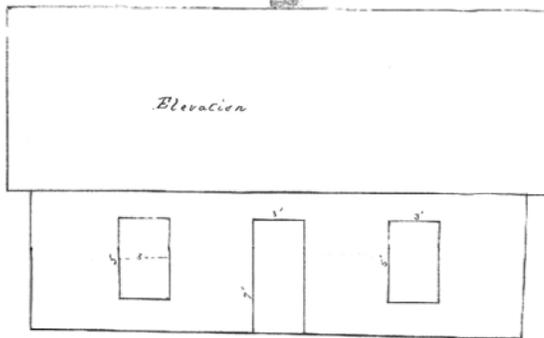
End View

Saddler's 20'	Paint Shop 20'	Carrriage makers 20'	Black Smith's 20'	Armourers 20'
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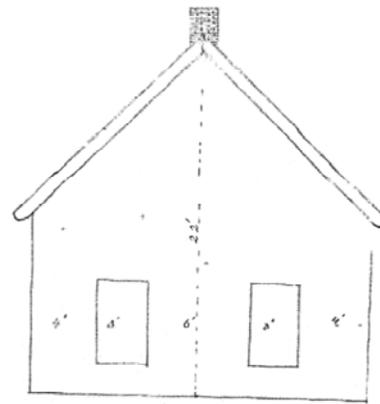
Drawn by Lieut W^m T Welcker Ordn Dept
January 8. 61

Plan

Scale 1 inch = 10 feet



Plan



End view

Proposed Laboratory at Vancouver Depot.

Drawn by Lieut W^m T Welcker Ordnance Dept

Scale. 1 inch = 10 feet

Plate 13

Abram Calvin Wildrick as a cadet at West Point. Image 1773, United States Military Academy.

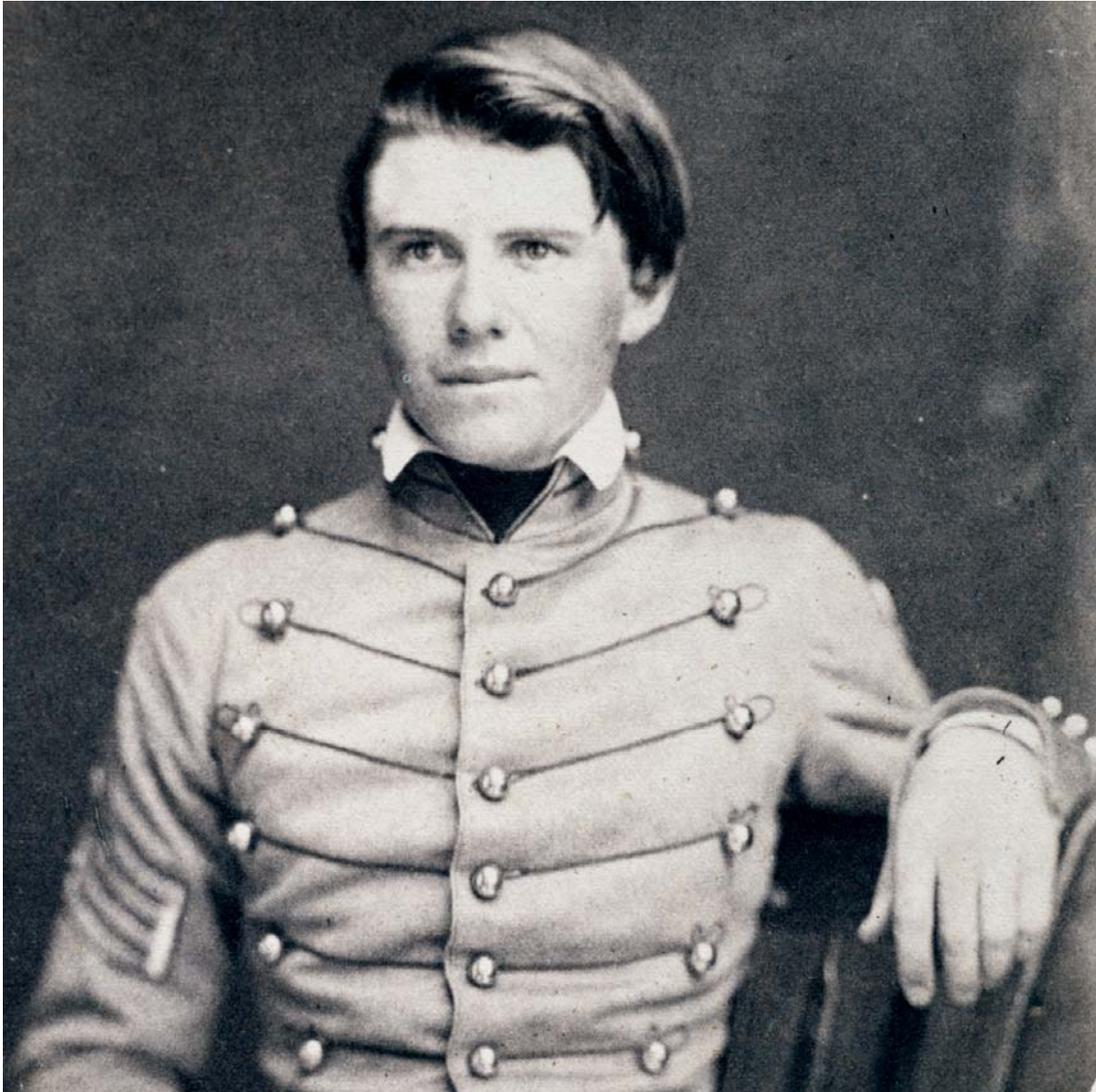


Plate 14

The Block House was utilized for many years by Vancouver Arsenal staff as family quarters. OrHi CN 015687.



Plate 15

Filling Cartridges at the United States Arsenal at Watertown, Massachusetts. A similar process would have been employed at the Vancouver post. Note that there is no evidence of women employed in cartridge filling in Vancouver. *Harpers Weekly*, 20 July 1861.



FILLING CARTRIDGES AT THE UNITED STATES ARSENAL, AT WATERTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS.—[SEE NEXT PAGE.]

Plate 16

Photo of Lawrence Sprague Babbitt as a cadet at West Point. United States Military Academy, Image No. 1947.



Plate 17

1866 Babbitt Plat. Structure A is the Artillery Shed, G is the Guard House, M is the Magazine, S is the Storehouse, and W is the Well. Enclosure, Babbitt to Dyer, 11 August 1866. Number 70. E- 21 Letters Received 1812- 1894, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, Record Group 156, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

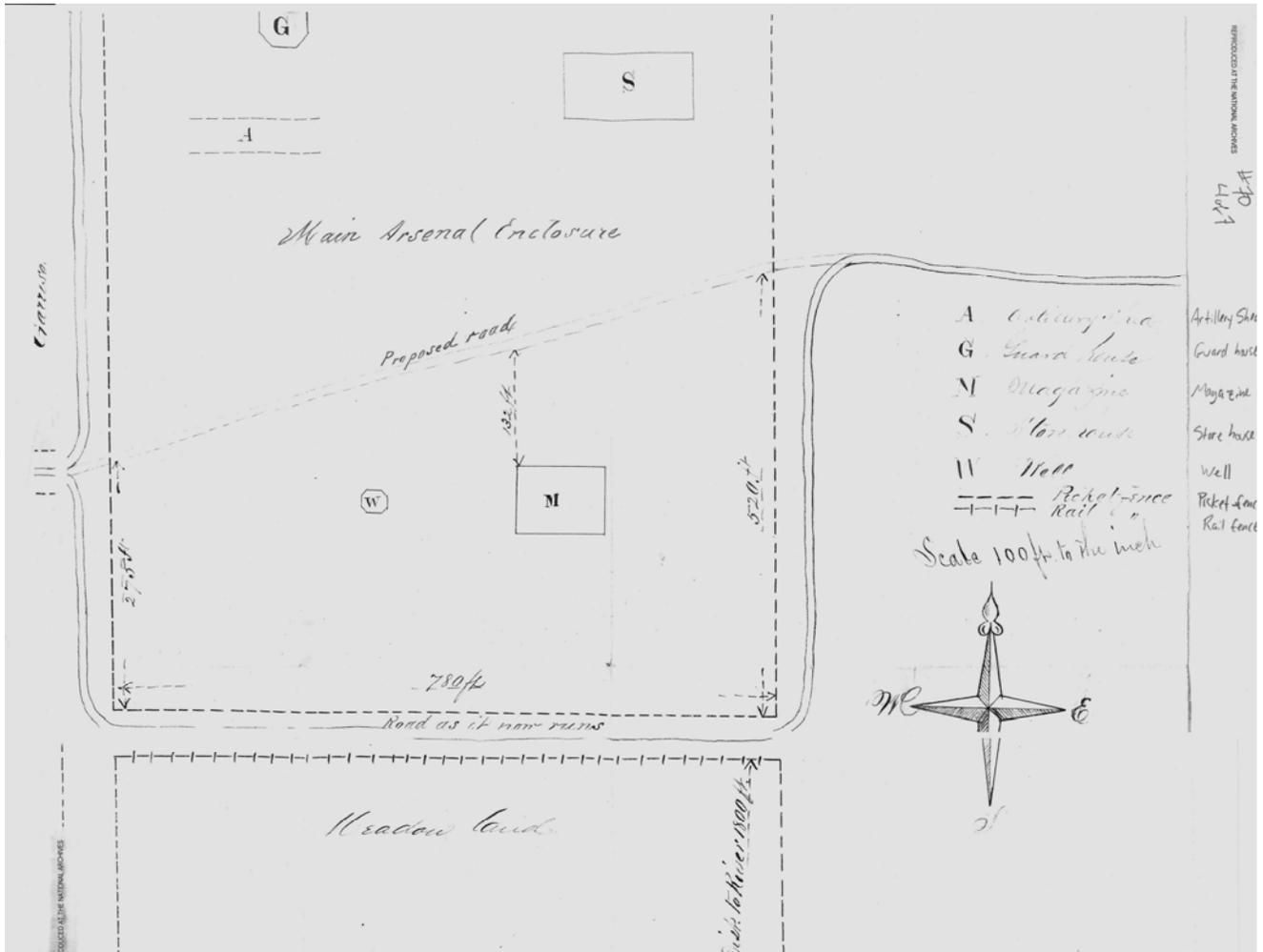


Plate 18

Detail of the northern portion of the Vancouver Arsenal grounds from the 1874 Ward map. National Archives.



Plate 19

Friction primers were used to ignite a cannon blast. Those pictured below were recovered archaeologically from the grounds of the Vancouver Arsenal in 2004. NPS Photo.



These solid shot cannon balls were recovered through archaeological excavations at Fort Vancouver NHS. NPS Photo.



Plate 20

Babbitt's telegram to Washington D.C., describes the destruction of his quarters by fire. The text reads "My quarters burned to ground. Shall I rebuild on same scale? Will cost five thousand dollars."

Source: Babbitt to Dyer, 24 April 1867. Number 25. E- 21 Letters Received 1812-1894, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, Record Group 156, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

U. S. MILITARY TELEGRAPH.
9 Pm
Hoy
By Telegraph from Vancouver or ¹⁸⁶³ ~~1867~~ ²³
To Gen A P Dyer
Chf ord
My quarters burned to
ground. Shall I rebuild
on same scale? Will
cost five thousand (5000)
dollars
L S Babbitt
16 C 765 Paid

Plate 21

Photo of Major John A. Kress. U.S. Library of Congress.

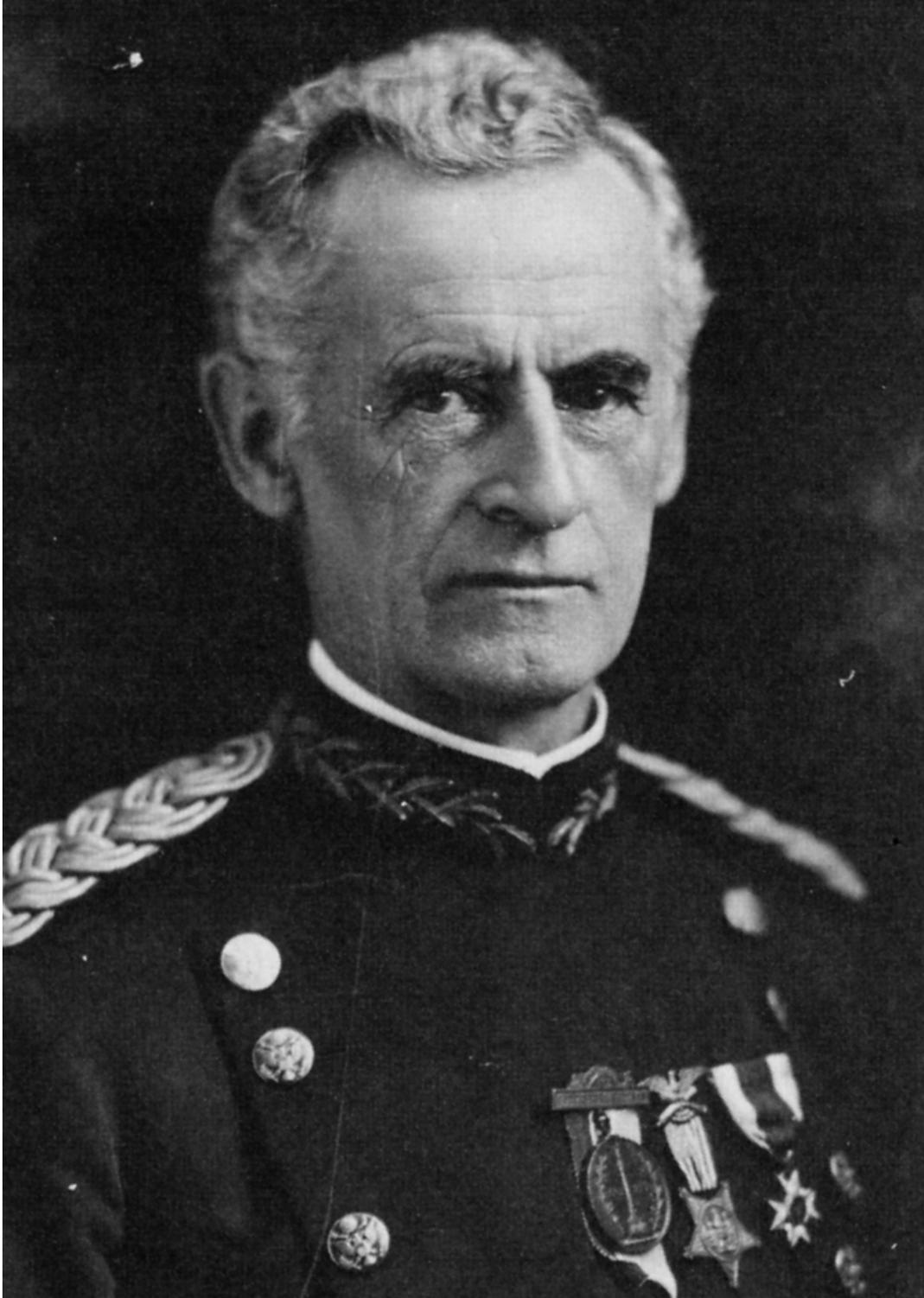


Plate 23

1886 Water Supply Map, Vancouver Barracks. Note the Department Headquarters building and others on the former site of the arsenal. Fort Vancouver NHS.

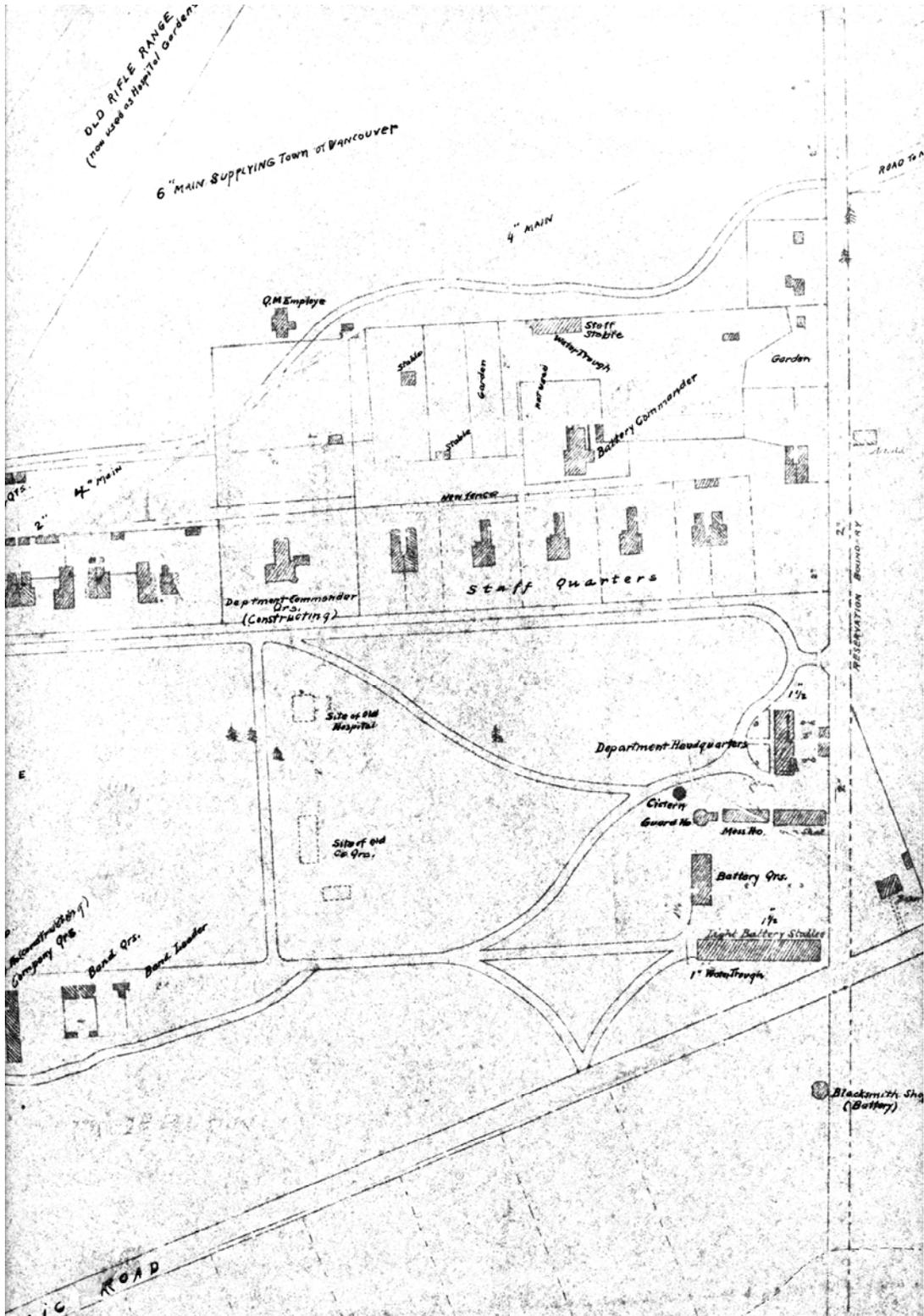


Plate 24

Image taken from the northeast portion the military reserve – perhaps the upper level of the department headquarters building – showing the grounds of the arsenal after the removal or conversion of its buildings to allow for the department headquarters complex. The octagonal building in the foreground is believed to be the arsenal’s guard house after relocation from an original position a few hundred yards to the northwest. The building with four windows visible to the left of the image may also be a converted arsenal building. National Archives.



Plate 25

Map of the Vancouver Arsenal, probably from the 1870s. National Archives.

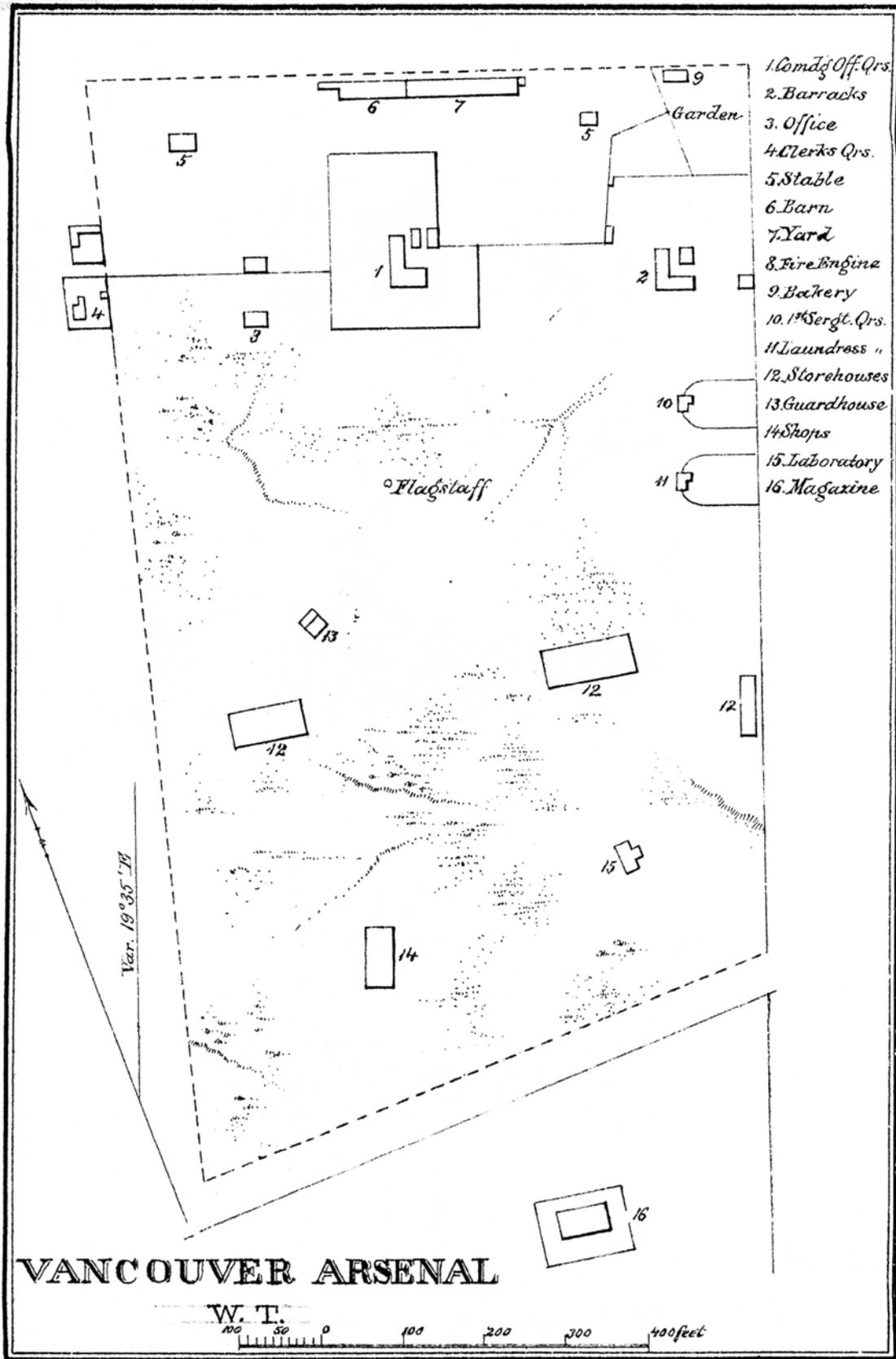


Plate 26

Photograph of Commanding Office's Quarters, Vancouver Arsenal, 1878. The family is probably that of Captain John A. Kress. Fort Vancouver NHS.



Plate 27

Photograph of Commanding Office's Quarters (right) and another building, possibly the Office (left), Vancouver Arsenal, 1870s. OrHi CN 015694.



Appendix 1

List of Metal Parts Required from the Atlantic, for a Store-house and Magazine to be Constructed at Vancouver Depot (28 January 1858)

Source: Theodore J. Eckerson, Vancouver Depot W.T., to H.K. Craig, Washington D.C., 28 January 1858. Number 22, E- 21 Letters Received 1812- 1894, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, Record Group 156, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Amount	Item
5,000	Squares of Roofing for Storehouse (6,720 sq. ft) 73 ¼ sq. per 100 ft.
130	Squares of Roofing for Magazine (1,400 sq. ft) 9 squares per 100 ft.
332	Feet of Copper Guttering
84	Feet of Copper Spouting
4	Copper ventilators
400	lbs Copper Nails, assorted sizes
2,000	lbs Iron Nails
30	Main Rafter Bolts, each 1 ½ in. round & 2 ½ ft. long
30	Main Straining Bolts, each 2 ½ in. round & 7 ¾ ft. long
1	Door Sill & Cap (Dimensions of Door, 8 x 10 ft.)
39	Window Sills, each 5.0 x 0.6 x 0.4
39	Window Caps, each 5.0 x 0.6 x 0.4
2	Window Sills, each 5.0 x 0.6 x 0.4

Appendix 2

Ordnance and Ordnance Stores On hand, Vancouver Depot, 13 October 1860

Source: Requisition for Ordnance and Ordnance Stores for Vancouver Depot W.T., October 13, 1860. Number 560, E- 21 Letters Received 1812- 1894, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, Record Group 156, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Artillery Implements & Equipment	Number
Tube Pouches	8
Gunner's Haversacks	6
Thumb Stalls	3
Priming Wires	10
Gunner's Gimlets	12
Lanyards for Friction Tubes	4
Gunner's Quadrants	3
Fuze Setters	8
Fuze Mallets	8
Pioneers Tools	
Tarpaulins, large	4
Dark Lanterns	3
Extra and Spare Parts	
Sinch Pins, extra	12
Shoulder Washers, extra	4
Sinch Washers, extra	13
Poles for siege carriage, extra	2
Screw Jacks	3
Fuzes	
Friction Tubes	3000
Priming Tubes, for Mortars	1600
Small Arms & Accoutrements	
Rifle Muskets and appendage sets	239
Cartridges	
Rifle Musket ball cartridges	150,000

Appendix 3

Estimate for Materials &C for Erecting Work Shops at Vancouver Depot W.T.

Source: William T. Welcker, Vancouver Depot W.T., to Col. H.K. Craig, Washington D.C., 07 January 1861. Number 127, E- 21 Letters Received 1812- 1894, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, Record Group 156, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

No.	Articles	Dolls cts
	Sills	54.40
	Hinges for 6 doors	12.00
19	Pairs of Sash (window)	76.00
	Socks & Bolts	20.00
	Strap Hinges & Bolts for shutters	20.00
20	Gross wood screws	20.00
	Assorted Nails	100.00
	Lime	30.00
4	Stoves and pipe	80.00
	Carpenter's Labor	600.00
	Mason's Labor	60.00
	Contingencies	200.00
		1272.40

Note: This estimate does not include fir lumber, the major construction material, as it had been procured the previous winter.

Estimate for Materials &C for Erecting a Laboratory at Vancouver Depot W.T.

Source: William T. Welcker, Vancouver Depot W.T., to Col. H.K. Craig, Washington D.C., 07 January 1861. Number 127, E- 21 Letters Received 1812- 1894, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, Record Group 156, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

No.	Articles	Dolls cts
3000	Feet Cedar lumber	105.00
2	Doors 3 x 7	12.00
8	Windows 10 x 14	32.00
	Locks, Hinges and Bolts	14.00
	Bar Iron for shutter fastenings	8.00
	Bolts for shutter fastenings	4.00
	Stove & pipe	25.00
	Carpenter's Labor	400.00
	Mason's Labor	10.00
	Contingencies	200.00
		710.00

Note: This estimate does not include fir lumber, the major construction material, as it had been procured the previous winter.

Appendix 4

Report of the Principal Operations of the Vancouver Arsenal for the Year Ending June 30, 1863

Source: Theodore J. Eckerson, Vancouver Arsenal W.T., to James W. Ripley, Washington D.C., 6 August 1863. Number 99. E- 21 Letters Received 1812- 1894, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, Record Group 156, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Fabricated

104	Belt holsters for Colt's pistols
86	Halters and Straps
100	6 pounder cartridges
61,025	Rifle elongated ball cartridges, Cal. 54
61,600	Rifle round ball cartridges, Cal. 54
25,500	Rifle blank cartridges
3	Latches, gate
1	Pair of Hooks and hinges
26	Halter Bolts
26	Halter squares
50	[illegible] of olive paint
1	Desk, office
1	Paper Case, office
2	Pairs of Andirons
1	Ball Guage, Cal. 54
1	Compass, Smith's
2	Fire screens
7	[illegible]
17	Feet of hose for water cont.
1	Table, laboratory
116	Packing boxes

Repaired

5	6 pounder gun carriages
6	Sets of Draft harness, mountain howitzer
6	Pack saddles and bridles, mountain howitzer
2	Ammunition chests, mountain howitzer
12	6 pounder Spherical Case Shot, fixed
252	12 pdr howitzer Shells, fixed
164	12 pdr howitzer spherical case, fixed
10	Sets of Artillery harness, lead
5	Sets of Artillery harness, wheel
2	Gunner's haversacks
1	Handspike, mountain howitzer
13	Sponges and rammers, 6 pdr

133	Carbines, Sharp's
4	Rifled Muskets, Cal .58
20	Rifles percussion, Sword bayonet
132	Rifles percussion, without bayonet
21	Muskets, flint lock
35	Pistols, Colt's Army, old model
41	Pistols, Colt's Navy
9	Pistols, n.s., smoothbore
111	Cavalry sabers
103	Infantry Cartridge boxes
5	Infantry Cartridge box plates
37	Cavalry Sabre Belts
23	Sword knots
1	Bridle, Comb
7	Halters and Straps
52	Sets of horse equipments, pattern 1859
18,000	Musket elong. ball cartridges, Cal .58

Other Work Done

4	Shot beds framed and land
4	24 pounder Seige guns, blackened
1995	24 pounder Cannon balls, blackened
106	Carbines, Sharp's, cleaned, oiled, and repacked
217	Rifled Musket, Cal .58, cleaned, oiled, and repacked
108	Rifles, sword bayonet, cleaned, oiled, and repacked
119	Rifles, without bayonet, cleaned, oiled, and repacked
17	Pistols, Colt's Army, O.M., cleaned, oiled, and repacked
37	Pistols, Colt's Navy, cleaned, oiled, and repacked
118	Cavalry sabers, cleaned, oiled, and repacked
19	Muskets, altered to percussion, cleaned, oiled, and repacked
24	Sets of Artillery harness, cleaned, oiled, and repacked
86	Comb bridles, cleaned, oiled, and repacked
70	Watering bridles, cleaned, oiled, and repacked
763	Rounds of fixed field Ammunition overhauled, examined, and repacked
91	Sets of horse equipments, pattern 1859, cleaned and varnished
27,100	Feet of lumber piled
625	Posts, Cut and hauled from the forest
120	Loads of gravel hauled
930	Lineal feet of 10 feet wide gravelled road constructed
1350	Lineal feet of 4 feet wide gravelled walk constructed
	Gun racks put up in Armorer's Shop and guard house
	A Sentry-box built for vicinity of storehouse

	Roads through public grounds repaired
	Shelves put in laboratory
	Flag staff, 125 ½ feet, erected
	Harder pillar made for smoking station
	[illegible] of original Survey of Military reserve
	Post harness kept in repair
	Fuel Cut and hauled for work shops
	Trestles for horse equipments put up in Storehouse and Saddler's shop
1495	Packages of Ordnance Stores received and issued

Buildings and Enclosures

Two rooms added to Officer's temporary quarters
Lining of barracks completed
Shed for forage built
Company Kitchen repaired
Brick Shed repaired
Block-house fitted up as quarters for a family of the detachment
900 Lineal yards of picket fence built around Magazine grounds
A Well, 40 feet deep, dug and [illegible], and a shed built over it
Out-houses, fences, and shed to porch in rear of barracks, repaired
Mast lightning rods erected at Magazine
Addition to Arsenal fence whitewashed
930 feet of barrier fence established, from eastern to western line of reserve
Storehouse, 120 x 140 feet, 2 stories high, painted
Office, 30 x 15 feet, 1 story high, painted
Magazine, 60 x 35 feet, 1 story high, painted
In addition to the supplies for the troops serving in the District of Oregon (embracing the State of Oregon and Territory of Washington,) four hundred muskets with appendages and accoutrements complete have been issued to the State of Oregon under the laws for Arming the Militia.

Appendix 5

“Plot to Seize Vancouver Arsenal” in “Conspiring Traitors: Democratic Secret Leagues – The Assassins Exposed”

Source: Portland *Morning Oregonian*, 25 August 1866

Before the Presidential election and while the scheme for a general uprising on election night was pending, the order in California had a general arrangement by which the State's arms were everywhere to be seized and if possible, also, *to secure the arsenal at Benecia*. In OREGON, THE ORDER WAS ARMED EVERYWHERE as fully as possible, but it but it was thought that not enough guns were in their possession to cope with the soldiers and such citizens as Gen Alvord arm. IT WAS THEREFORE, DETERMINED TO GET POSSESSION OF THE VANCOUVER ARSENAL. The plot was as follows:

On the west side of the garrison is a row of stables, the armory or store house for arms is nearly a half mile to the east in an enclosure separated entirely from the garrison and guarded by one sentinel, the magazine is in the same enclosure but standing by itself, down on the flat toward the river and usually guarded by one sentinel. Within that enclosure there were not beside the sentinels, more than half a dozen men, usually, including Captain Eckerson, military storekeeper, and his clerks. The plot was to take forty picked men from the Portland encampments, under command of one of the Captains of the Guard, cross one or two at a time to the Columbia River opposite the ordnance grounds. When all were ready they were to cross at midnight to the east side of the river, landing opposite the magazine, thence to crawl up to the enclosure of the ordnance grounds, and wait for the concerted signal. Two trusty men were to go by way of the town *to the rear of the stables aforementioned* AND FIRE THEM a few minutes after the posting of the midnight sentinels and when the fire should be well under way, *to raise the greatest possible alarm, assisted by other confederates within the garrison*. This was expected to attract to the fire, every person in or about the ordnance grounds, except the sentinels. A couple of active men for each, were expected to gag them so as to prevent any outcry. In the first confusion of the alarm *the “captain” with his forty picked men were to spring onto the grounds, FORCE THE ARMORY TAKE WHAT ARMS THEY COULD CARRY AND HAUL WITH A TEAM ON HAND, SPIKE OR RENDER UNSERVICEABLE ALL THE REST, BLOW UP THE MAGAZINE, with a three minutes fuse, retreat to their flatboat, and go down the river a short distance to a point before selected and ENTRENCH*. The object was not really so much to *procure* arms as to DESTROY, SO THAT GEN ALVORD COULD NOT ARM THE CITIZENS OF OREGON.

This patriotic and eminently democratic scheme was frustrated by a member of the order – one of the party – who got possession of the papers, and gave them, with an expose of the whole plot, to Captain Porter, the Provost

Marshall for Washington Territory, who instantly informed General Alvord. A confederate at Vancouver informed the order here that their plot was known and precautions adopted at the garrison to defeat it. The expedition was therefore not undertaken.

For the strict truth of these statements, we can furnish affidavits of responsible parties. The oath bound conspirators may deny – they *will* do so, for they are sworn to it – but the facts are grounded on the testimony of competent and reliable witnesses.

Appendix 6

Serviceable Small Arms Remaining on Hand at Vancouver Arsenal, 15 June 1866

Source: Babbitt to Dyer, 15 June 1866. Number 54. E-21 Letters Received 1812-1894, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, Record Group 156, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Category	Item	Number
Carbines	Carbines, Maynards, breech loading	312
Muskets & Rifles	Rifled Muskets, Springfield, Cal .58	824
	Rifles, U.S. Sword Bayonet, Mod. 1840, Cal .54	493
	Rifles, U.S., without bayonet, Mod. 1840, Cal .54	958
	Rifled Muskets, primer lock, Cal .69	189
	Muskets, Smooth-bore, Altered to Percussion, Cal .69	2533
	Muskets, Smooth-bore, Mod. 1842, Cal .69	642
	Musketoons, Smooth-bore, Artillery	8
	Muskets, Smooth-bore, flint lock, Cal .69	59
Pistols	Colt's Army, N.M. [New Model] Cal .44	79
	Colt's Army, O.M. [Old Model] Cal .44	35
	Colt's Navy	1
	Smooth bore, Model 1840, Cal .54	80
Sabres	Cavalry Officers	20
	Staff Officers	5
	Cavalry, G.P. Am. Manufacture	154
	Horse Artillery, Am. Manufacture	0
Swords	Foot Officer's	18
	Staff Officer's	4
	Musicians, leather scabbards	53
	N.C. Officers, leather scabbards	78
	Sword bayonets, U.S. Rifle	679

Appendix 7

Statement of Property Procured and Issued at Vancouver Arsenal (July 1, 1865 to June 30, 1866)

Source: Babbitt to Dyer, 17 August 1866. Number 78. E- 21 Letters Received 1812- 1894, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, Record Group 156, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Item	On Hand 1 July 1865	On Hand 30 June 1866
Field Artillery Carriages	2	2
Siege Artillery Carriages	4	4
Caissons	2	2
Battery Wagons	1	1
Sets of Infantry Accoutrements	3918	4044
Sets of Cavalry Accoutrements	87	94
Sets of Horse Equipments	386	315
Sets of Artillery Harness for Two Horses	12	12
Saddle Blankets	124	364
Cartridges for Small Arms	931,578	928,266
Rounds of Ammunition for Field Guns	1952	2398
Cannon Cartridges Without Projectiles	33	112
Percussion Caps	411,300	328,300
Friction Primers	2484	1784
Fuzes	490	490
Lead Bullets and Buckshot (lbs)	28,544 ½	28,044 1/2
Round Shot and Shells for Field Guns	108	108
Round Shot and Shells for Siege Guns	1995	1981
Grape & Canister Shot, Stands & Plates (lbs)	84 ½	84 ½
Gunpowder, lbs	16,600	16,099

Appendix 9

Textual Files Reviewed at NARA 1

Note: This listing does not include a listing of copies of maps and images obtained by the author from NARA 2. These are located in the map collection of the park's Archives and Reference Collection.

1.) Textual Files Reviewed by Gregory P. Shine at NARA 1, 14-18 January 2008

RG 156 Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance
General Records, Letters Received, 1812- 1894

Box 195 1853A- 1853F
Box 198 1853S- 1853V
Box 211 1856D – 1856H
Box 216 1857E – 1857L
Box 221 1858C – 1858H
Box 228 1859C – 1859G
Box 236 1860B – 1860G
Box 245 1861D – 1861G
Box 261 1862E – 1862H
Box 276 1863E – 1863F
Box 282 1863S – 1863W
Box 288 1864C – 1864F
Box 294 1864S – 1864W
Box 298 1865A – 1865C
Box 299 1865C – 1865F
Box 305 1865T – 1865W
Box 308 1866A – 1866D
Box 312 1866R to 1866W
Box 315 1867A – 1867B
Box 320 1867S – 1867Z
Box 322 1867Z – 1868B
Box 323 1868B – 1868H
Box 326 1868S – 1868W
Box 329 1868Z – 1869B
Box 330 1869B – 1869F
Box 334 1869S – 1869W
Box 338 1870B – 1870E
Box 342 1870S- 1870W

RG 156 Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance

General Records, Letters Received, 1812- 1894
Year 1872, Box 295 File Nos. 533- 970
Year 1872, Box 300 File Nos. 3226- 3699

RG 156 Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance
E 328 Construction Division Register of Letters Received, 2 Vols.
Vol 1, 1861 – 1863
Vol 2, 1863 – 1870

RG 156 Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance
Entry 100: Quarterly Summary Statements of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores on
Hand at Forts, Permanent Batteries, and Garrisons, 1838- 53; 1862- 64
Vol. 5 of 8: Quarter ending 30 Sep 1863
Vol. 4 of 8
Vol. 3 of 8
Vol. 2 of 8
Vol. 1 of 8

RG 156 Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance
E 101: Quarterly Summary of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores On Hand at
Armories, Arsenal, and Depots of the United States

RG 156 Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance
Entry 1003, Reports of Inspections of Arsenal and Depots, 1832- 1860; 1892.

RG156 Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance
General Records, Correspondence, 1794- 1941
Entry 6, Letters, Telegrams, Endorsements Sent to Ordnance Officers
Vol. 12 of 81(21 Nov 1850 to 06 Mar 1852)
Vol. 13 of 81(06 Mar 1852 to 28 May 1853)
Vol. 14 of 81(28 May 1853 to 31 Oct 1854)
Vol. 15 of 81(31 Oct 1854 to 15 Dec 1855)
Vol. 16 of 81(15 Dec 1855 to 10 Nov 1856)
Vol. 17 of 81(10 Nov 1856 to 8 Mar 1858)
Vol. 18 of 81(8 Mar 1858 to 7 Apr 1859)
Vol. 19 of 81(7 Apr 1859 to 16 Apr 1860)
Vol. 20 of 81(16 Apr 1860- 15 Jun 1861)

[NOTE: Vols. 21- 36 Not Reviewed]

Vol. 37 of 81(28 Oct 1870 to 12 Jun 1871)
Vol. 38 of 81(13 Jun 1871 to 20 Feb 1872)
Vol. 39 of 81(20 Feb 1872 to 09 Sep 1872)
Vol. 40 of 81(09 Sep 1872 to 08 May 1873)

Vol. 41 of 81(09 May 1873 to 22 Sep 1873)
Vol. 42 of 81(22 Sep 1873 to 13 Mar 1874)
Vol. 43 of 81(13 Mar 1874 to 24 Aug 1874)
Vol. 44 of 81(25 Aug 1874 to 5 Apr 1875)
Vol. 45 of 81(5 Apr 1875 to 22 Sep 1875)
Vol. 46 of 81 (22 Sep 1875 to 31 Mar 1876)

[NOTE: Vols. 47 through 52 not reviewed]

Vol. 53 of 81(12 Nov 1878 to 14 May 1879)
Vol. 54 of 81(14 May 1879 to 19 Sep 1879)
Vol. 55 of 81(20 Sep 1879 to 24 Jan 1880)
Vol. 56 of 81(26 Jan 1880 to 04 Jun 1880)
Vol. 57 of 81(05 Jun 1880 to 23 Oct 1880)
Vol. 58 of 81(25 Oct 1880 to 11 Apr 1881)
Vol. 59 of 81(11 Apr 1881 to 31 Aug 1881)
Vol. 60 of 81(31 Aug 1881 to 21 Jan 1882)

2.) Notes on Textual Files Reviewed by Dr. Douglas C. Wilson at NARA 1, 5-6 November 2007

National Archives Trip November 2007 - Douglas C. Wilson

The bulk of my time over the two full days in the archives was focused on Record Group 156, Records of the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, "E- 21" Letters Received, 1812 – 1894.

November 5, 2007. The records people suggested that I look at the indexing for the records as well as pull my first group at the same time. The index was not helpful. My first pull was for the letter "W" for the years 1858 through 1861 trying to catch correspondence from Abram C. Wildrick. This proved to be very fortunate due to (1) bracketing the years on either side of his tenure at the Ordnance Depot and (2) that some of the materials for "S" were packaged in the same boxes that were retrieved under "W". This allowed me to find the initial year's letters from Sill, starting with a status report at Benecia Barracks prior to arrival at Fort Vancouver. I also had the second half of "S" for 1859 which allowed me to pick up the last few letters of Sill prior to the introduction of Welcker. Luckily, many of the commanders of the depot had a "W" as a last name, including White, Wood, Welcker, and Wildrick. I spent most of my time on this first pull, later on November 6 pulling "S" for 1859 to pick up the first part of Sill.

Most of the letters received were simple cover letters for reports – usually the monthly and quarterly reports. I have included a few from the Depot as examples of the typical type of cover letters and one contemporary one from Sheridan at Fort Yamhill. The simplicity of the correspondence was not the case for Sill and Welcker. Because of the difficulties in setting up the Arsenal/Depot, there were many letters and additions to the standard covers that made them very useful.

I have indexed the letters based on the correspondent and the number of the letter. Attachments, usually copies of letters or drawings, are numbered with the original letters. All of the letters come from the above record group and E21.

Some letters were not copied as they appeared to represent simple covers for returns/reports, etc. I have listed the letters that were not copied in my notes.

GIS Maps

[To be added by Cromwell]