

10-1-2006

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Wetherington, Ronald K.. "Cantonment Burgwin: The Archaeological and Documentary Record." *New Mexico Historical Review* 81, 4 (2021). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol81/iss4/3>

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Cantonment Burgwin

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND DOCUMENTARY RECORD

Ronald K. Wetherington

On 14 August 1852, the U.S. Army established Cantonment Burgwin outside of Don Fernando de Taos (present-day Taos), New Mexico, to defend settlements against Utes and Jicarilla Apaches. It was shut down and abandoned in August 1860. Built as a temporary facility, its structures were already in advanced decay by the mid-1850s, and, despite curtailment of funds for repair and rebuilding, the post underwent substantial construction in its final years. This evidence comes from both military correspondence and archaeological excavations. Together, they provide insight into the frustrations of the frontier military working under constraints imposed by a distant military bureaucracy. This paper examines and reconstructs those tumultuous nine years by comparing official documents with data from archaeological excavations.

The Role of Archaeology

Historical military archaeology has a distinct advantage because it utilizes both historical records and the data from excavation, potentially lending a mutually reinforced accuracy to the interpretation of the past. Excavations

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frequently provide gap-filling details to the often abundant military records. This is particularly true when such records include terse and annoyingly detail-free military reports and correspondence, which often constitute our only documentary record of military posts. In addition diaries and drawings from those stationed at Cantonment Burgwin during its short history provide intriguing personal vignettes. From the evidence uncovered by systematic archaeological excavations carried out at this site since 1956, scholars are one step closer to understanding the cantonment's pivotal role in securing the western frontier.

In 1956 avid amateur historian Ralph Rounds discovered from military records that the old post almost certainly rested on his property. He enlisted Museum of New Mexico archaeologist Fred Wendorf to help him locate it, and Rounds promised to fund its excavation. As excavations proceeded, Rounds financed an authentic reconstruction and established the facility as a research center. In 1967 Southern Methodist University acquired the Fort Burgwin Research Center. It has since become a summer campus of the university used for teaching and research in the arts and sciences. Excavations there have provided professional training for numerous students.

Sumner's Plan for Posts and Provisions

When Col. Edwin V. Sumner took command of the Ninth Military Department in July 1851, he initiated a comprehensive effort to relocate most of the troops to more strategic positions on the Indian frontier. Troops were withdrawn from all sizable settlements, including El Paso, Socorro, Albuquerque, Las Vegas, Taos, and Cebolleta. Sumner immediately moved the departmental headquarters and supply depot from Santa Fe to the newly established Fort Union on the eastern plains near Las Vegas, New Mexico. Fort Union allowed military supplies arriving on the Santa Fe Trail to be warehoused instantly and then redistributed to the various posts along and beyond the Rio Grande.

Sumner established Fort Massachusetts on the department's northern frontier to protect one of the more common trade routes through the San Luis Valley from the Utes. On the western frontier, just over the current New Mexico border in Arizona, he created Fort Defiance to control the Navajos. To the south, Sumner set up Fort Conrad, just south of Socorro, and Fort Filmore, just north of the U.S.-Mexico border. In all, nine new posts helped to define Sumner's new plan for the efficient and effective defense of New Mexico.

The U.S. Army began construction on Cantonment Burgwin the year after Sumner took command and situated it on the principal route connecting Fort Union to all of the posts north of Santa Fe and on the only path between Taos and Santa Fe. This location afforded quick military response to Ute and Apache threats to settlements and supply trains. Consequently, the cantonment provided both a permanent station and temporary quarters for dragoon, mounted riflemen, and artillery units as northern New Mexico witnessed shifting struggles for control of the territory.¹

“To Reduce the Enormous Expenditures”

Establishing a more effective system of territorial defense was only one reason for Sumner’s appointment as military commander. Expenditures on the western frontier had risen sharply at midcentury. In 1850 the sixty-seven posts west of the Mississippi housed three times the military personnel as did the thirty-three posts located in the East. Gen. Thomas Jessup, quartermaster general of the army, struggled in a futile attempt to fund this expansion, while Congress “displayed little interest in, or appreciation of, the problems Jessup and his department faced” as it focused on reducing the size of the army following the U.S.-Mexico War.² Indeed, Pres. James K. Polk cut Jessup’s proposed military budget for 1850 by “more than \$900,000.”³

Sec. of War Charles Conrad explicitly instructed Sumner to undertake cost-cutting changes, such as those that would substantially reduce costs in supporting the troops, “particularly in regard to forage, fuel, and adaptation of the surrounding country to cultivation.”⁴ Moving troops out of towns to rural areas permitted the U.S. Army to experiment with military agriculture and herding. In a letter appointing Sumner to department commander, Conrad impressed upon Sumner the critical necessity of cutting back and of keeping a more vigilant eye on expenses in the Quartermaster and Subsistence departments. Sumner thus focused on economic measures, including the development of greater self-sufficiency in food production—an experiment which failed dramatically. He also attempted to virtually eliminate civilian contract labor and services, agreeing with Conrad that “the number of employees may be diminished without inconvenience to the service.”⁵ This effort also proved ineffective, and within a short time the army employed even more civilians as mechanics, carpenters, teamsters, herders, and the like.

“Shut out from the World”: The Cantonment’s Location

Sumner passionately believed that increased efficiency depended on improved morale, which was already seriously eroded in New Mexico settlements through the lack of discipline and “vicious associations”—gambling, drinking, and prostitution. The situation in Don Fernando de Taos, however, was more complex. Troops had been stationed there since the Taos Rebellion of January 1847, an incident in which Gov. Charles Bent and other government officials and citizens were killed. The presence of soldiers in Don Fernando de Taos gave town administrators and sympathetic citizenry comfort and security, for there was a general fear that continuing disquietude among some citizens made the town ripe for further rebellious acts.⁶

The new Cantonment Burgwin, named after First Dragoon Capt. John H. K. Burgwin, who was mortally wounded in the 1847 assault on San Geronimo Church at Taos Pueblo when he attempted to quell the rebellion, would need to be located within close proximity to Taos in order to secure the town if the fire of revolt rekindled. Sumner personally chose the location of Cantonment Burgwin and provided details for its construction in his orders to the cantonment’s first commander, Lt. Robert Ransom Jr., on 10 August 1852, promising to send a wagon with the necessary tools.⁷ Construction began on 1 September 1852 and was sufficiently completed to house its assigned troops two months later. The hasty construction reflected the intended temporary character of the post. On 24 August 1852, Colonel Sumner wrote Lieutenant Ransom concerning the delay in sending tools from Fort Union: “Until they arrive employ all your force in getting in logs. Your quarters are half done when the timber is cut and hauled. You can borrow some axes from Mr. Hatcher [a local civilian].”⁸ Archaeological excavations confirm the temporary nature of the cantonment. The upright logs forming the walls of almost all of the facilities were put in the ground without any protection against decay from moisture or insects (see cover image).

Pvt. James A. Bennett, one of the dragoons who participated in this construction and spent several years at the cantonment, recorded his impressions in a diary. On 7 August 1852, he wrote: “Arrived Taos and established our camp 8 miles south of town in a cañon or gorge of the mountain. This is to be the future site of a fort which we have come to build. Surrounded by mountains, it looks as though we were shut out from the world.”⁹

At its inception, the cantonment was to be assigned one or two companies of the First Dragoons. The troops would provide protection for settle-

ments in the Taos Valley and escort military shipments from the depot at Fort Union to posts along the northern Rio Grande and in western New Mexico. Likewise, the cantonment was conveniently located to provide temporary bivouac for detachments moving from one assignment to another.

Episodes of Growth: Maps and Sketches

Historical documents, drawings, and data from excavations detail at least three definable episodes of growth at the cantonment: the initial 1852 construction, the expansion prior to 1857, and the final construction at the facility after 1857. Drawings made by Insp. Joseph K. F. Mansfield in 1853 (fig. 1) and Surg. William W. Anderson in 1857 (fig. 2) clearly demonstrate that both expansion and remodeling of the facilities took place between these years. Archaeological excavations reveal further substantial remodeling and new building between 1857 and 1860.

Mansfield, of the Inspector General's Department, was directed to conduct a comprehensive inspection of military facilities in the Ninth Military Department in 1853. For each of the nine posts he visited, he sketched a plan map; described the conditions of the structures, personnel, animals, and access roads; and made recommendations for improvements. Mansfield prepared a map of Cantonment Burgwin during his inspection visit from 11 August to 13 August 1853.¹⁰

Anderson was appointed as assistant surgeon on 29 June 1849. He was assigned to several posts in the Ninth Military Department during the 1850s, and served at Cantonment Burgwin from November 1856 through April 1860. He served the Confederate States Army as surgeon from 1861 to 1865. Anderson resigned on 20 April 1886.¹¹ He made at least three sketches of the cantonment, which contribute to the current archaeological interpretations.

Initial Construction and the Mansfield Map

At the time of Mansfield's visit in early August 1853, forty-three troops resided at the post. An additional thirty-two remained on detached duty or on leave, for an aggregate of seventy-five—all members of Company I, First Dragoons. This was the approximate garrison size of the cantonment from its inception, and the facilities would not hold any substantial increase without either expansion or the use of tents for housing. By contrast, the U.S. Army constructed most military posts to accommodate two companies of approximately fifty officers and men each.

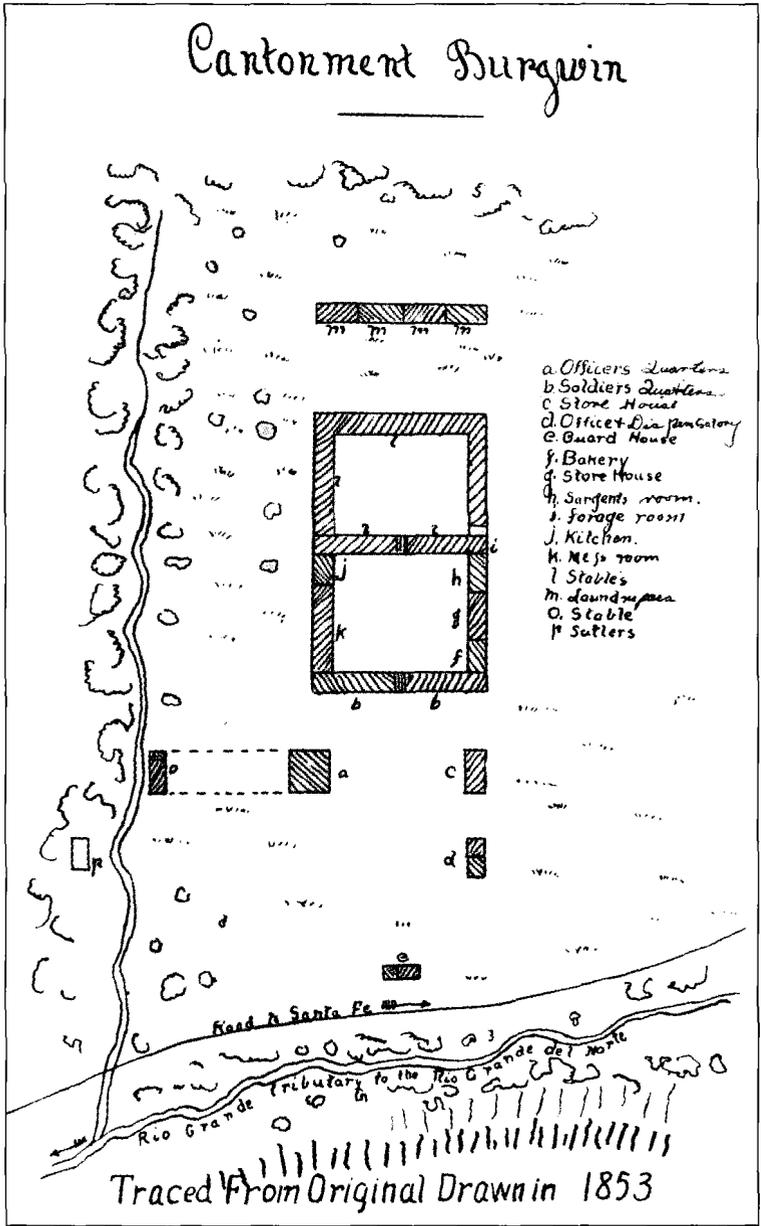


FIG. 1. JOSEPH K. F. MANSFIELD'S MAP OF CANTONMENT BURGWIN, 1853
(TRACED FROM ORIGINAL)

From Joseph K. F. Mansfield, "Report of Inspection of the Department of New Mexico, 1853," Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, Record Group 94, National Archives.

Excavations have confirmed the general reliability of Mansfield's Burgwin map (fig. 1). Some new construction occurred, some buildings did not change during the post's occupation, and other buildings underwent remodeling. Mansfield's map gives a good reference point against which to evaluate subsequent changes. In basic respects, the building layout follows a common pattern, with enlisted men quartered in the main fort structure (labeled *b*), the laundress's quarters (*m*) on the east side, and the sutler (*p*) situated some distance away across the perennial Pot Creek. The rectangular area between the soldiers' quarters (*b*) and the guard house (*e*) served as the parade ground. The military road was positioned between the stream and guard house.

Mansfield illustrated officers' quarters (*a*) with its own attached corral and stable (*o*) on the northeast corner of the parade ground, and a store house (*c*) and office and dispensary (*d*) on the south side. Until November 1853, the only officer usually present on the cantonment grounds was the commanding officer, and for three consecutive months, no officer resided at the post.¹²

Of the structures Mansfield illustrated, the double-courtyard main compound, laundress's quarters, officers' quarters, and office and dispensary have been excavated. The first three of these remained essentially as Mansfield drew them, including the several room partitions (although none are shown for the officers' quarters), indicating that no modifications were made during the seven succeeding years. The dispensary, however, was expanded at least twice after 1853 to become a post hospital. Many new structures sprung up on the cantonment's premises.

Later Construction and the Anderson Drawing

The Anderson sketch reveals the addition of several buildings (fig. 2). In this drawing, completed four years after Mansfield's visit, the laundress's quarters and the fort compound with its western courtyard and eastern stables

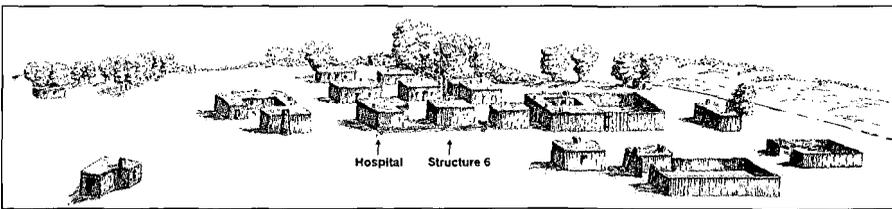


FIG. 2. SURGEON ANDERSON'S 1857 SKETCH OF CANTONMENT BURGWIN FROM A TERRACE TO THE SOUTH

(Courtesy Fort Burgwin Research Center, Taos, New Mexico)

remain essentially unchanged from 1853, as does the officers' quarters, which was by then the commander's quarters. The most noticeable additions are the new structures on either side of the parade ground, those between the parade ground and sutler's store, the G-shaped officers quarters bordering the parade ground on the west, and the corrals and buildings south of the fort compound. It is also evident that the office and dispensary (labeled *d* on Mansfield's map) had been enlarged into a hospital and surgeon's office, and a third structure had been added to the south side of the parade ground.

Excavations at Burgwin began in 1956 and, to date, seven structures have been examined. The main compound, commander's quarters, and officers' quarters were all excavated and reconstructed in 1956–1958. The laundress's quarters were excavated in 1965, but have not been reconstructed. The hospital was excavated in 1967 and has since been reconstructed. Hospital excavations reveal remodeling after Anderson's 1857 sketch. Two structures were excavated in 2001–2002: a duplex officers' residence (present in Anderson's drawing), which archaeologists refer to as structure 6; and a structure adjacent to the officers' residence (added after 1857), which archaeologists labeled structure 7.

These excavations have confirmed that repairs and rebuilding of existing structures occurred sporadically from the beginning, but that major additions and remodeling occurred during the latter half of Burgwin's occupation. Documents testify that decay and imminent collapse played a decisive role in this construction, in addition to the need for expanded facilities.

Beginning in November 1853, the garrison suddenly almost doubled and remained at this size through March 1854 (see fig. 3). This increase coincided with the temporary abandonment of Fort Massachusetts, some sixty miles north of Taos in present-day southern Colorado, and the repositioning of its Company F, First Dragoons, at Cantonment Burgwin. Maj. George J. H. Blake, commanding Company F, took over as Burgwin commander at that time. In a letter to Blake dated 27 October 1853, acting Adj. Gen. William A. Nichols wrote:

The Brig. Gen. commanding the department directs me to say to you that if there are not sufficient quarters or stabling for two companies of dragoons at Cant. Burgwin to hire quarters, etc. in the vicinity for a period of time not exceeding three or six months as the change in the garrison of Fort Massachusetts is not a permanent one.¹³

Figure 3
Aggregate Troops at Cantonment Burgwin, 1852–1860*

	1852	1853	1854	1855	1856	1857	1858	1859	1860
January		67	*	92	76	157	236	175	163
February		67	139	92	83	153	79	92	162
March		65	117	92	79	147	79	169	157
April		64	79	91	80	200	83	168	74
May		64	135	161	79	216	78	167	4
June		64	67	84	79	216	78	167	
July		64	57	35	78	135	69	166	
August		73	55	35	78	129	69	164	
September	76	72	84	75	77	132	68	169	
October	74	71	77	75	160	134	85	168	
November	73	139	73	76	160	210	85	167	
December	69	140	68	77	157	238	85	165	

*The information in this figure is taken from Roll 161, *Return from U.S. Military Posts, 1800–1916*, Microcopy 617A (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1968), Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s–1917, Record Group 94, National Archives. The return for January 1854 is missing.

Blake responded on 6 November, seeking permission to expand the quarters at Burgwin in order to keep his command together:

The quarters and stabling at this post are not sufficient for the accommodations of the two companies, but I think, in the course of 30 or 40 days, I can build sufficient for their accommodation. . . . I know of no quarters suitable for a company nearer than Taos, and which I presume could be hired, but I would much prefer to build than to have the command so far separated. . . . I would ask, if allowed to build, to purchase what adobes and lumber may be necessary, it being now too late to make or saw the same.¹⁴

Blake's request was refused, and he rented quarters and stables in Taos. On 23 April 1854, Company F returned to Fort Massachusetts.

The number of troops stationed at Cantonment Burgwin fluctuated. Troop maneuvers variously increased and decreased the number of soldiers housed there, bringing in companies of the First Dragoons, Third Infantry, Mounted Rifles, and the Texas Mounted Volunteers. The 1854–1856 troop

fluctuations corresponded with military campaigns against the increasingly active Apaches and Utes, including the infamous Battle of Cieneguilla in March 1854.¹⁵ It was, however, during the final period—1857 through 1859—that the last construction phase at Cantonment Burgwin occurred, despite military correspondence denying permission to build.

“Not Safe to Be Occupied”: The Decaying Cantonment

The construction materials and methods used to build Cantonment Burgwin were indicative of the availability of timber in the immediate vicinity and the haste with which Burgwin was built. The expense of employing troops to cut down timber from surrounding stands of ponderosa pine was less than hiring civilians to make adobes, even though adobe construction would have been more substantial. Sumner cared little that the soft pine was so prone to decay and infestation, for the post was of a temporary character. With winter approaching, the soldiers rushed to complete the cantonment. Both their haste and lack of construction experience led to poor workmanship.

On the other hand, the other posts constructed under Sumner’s command were no better. “All of them were poorly constructed,” wrote historian Robert W. Frazer, “and began to deteriorate even before they were completed.”¹⁶ Even as early as May 1853, Lieutenant Ransom asked for help in repairing the hastily built structures at Burgwin. In response, he was informed that the “hire of mechanics has not been allowed as the work upon the barracks, officers quarters, etc. must be done by the troops themselves.”¹⁷

The method of construction was uniform throughout the period of the fort’s occupation. Walls were built with upright ponderosa logs. Green and undressed, these logs were placed close together in a trench approximately two feet deep, and occasionally, but not often, supported at the base with native stone. Adobe filled the spaces between the logs. In all but the storage rooms, an adobe layer enclosed the logs, providing a reasonably smooth surface for interior walls. A thin layer of locally mined white gypsum plaster, often with specks of mica, covered these walls. This plaster treatment was traditional, and local Hispanas specialized in this effort, although whether these women worked at the fort is unknown.

Floors were either adobe or wood. Two methods were used for wood floors. Puncheon was a method in which hand-adzed split logs were placed next to each other flat side up. In the second method, roughly planed planks nailed to joists were laid directly on a smoothed dirt floor. Roofs were flat,

with vigas supporting locally sawed planks or latillas, upon which up to six inches of dirt was packed. Fortunately, a sawmill sat downstream from the fort, although it was initially in disrepair. With construction of the fort underway, Lieutenant Ransom wrote to Colonel Sumner on 24 October 1852 that the owner of the sawmill “has given me permission to use it for one year as long as I wish provided I will put it in order.”¹⁸ Often frugal to a fault, Sumner replied, “If you can repair it with very little expense, do so, but not otherwise, as you will need but few boards, and they can easily be sawn by hand.”¹⁹

The flat-roofed construction encouraged decay and water damage, hastening the need for repair from the beginning; however, repair and expansion funding was seldom forthcoming. Sumner was succeeded by Bvt. Brig. Gen. John Garland, who arrived at his Albuquerque headquarters on 18 August 1853. Garland initially followed the austerity policy of his predecessor. Acting Asst. Adj. Gen. William A. Nichols’s letter of 2 September to Ransom instructed him “not to make any additions or extensions to the work now occupied by your company.”²⁰ Certainly by mid-decade, repairs throughout the department were critical, and on occasion civilian carpenters were employed—a realistic reversal of Sumner’s policy by his replacement.²¹

The estimated funds needed by the Quartermaster Department at Cantonment Burgwin for the fiscal year beginning 1 July 1858 included six hundred dollars for “materials for repairing wagons, quarters, etc., [and] 20,000 feet of lumber.”²² The estimate also included extra duty pay for one carpenter. The following year, the desperate state of the cantonment’s buildings was clearly communicated to Santa Fe by 2d Lt. Herbert M. Enos, Burgwin’s new acting assistant quartermaster. On 24 March 1859, Enos wrote Maj. J. L. Donaldson, assistant quartermaster for the army:

The buildings used as quarters, hospital, and for stabling are so much decayed that they are liable to fall at any moment. They are regarded by everyone to be exceedingly dangerous and not safe to be occupied either by man or beast. The logs forming the walls and the vegas [*sic*], or rafters, supporting the roofs are nearly rotted off, so that it would require but a comparatively small force to push them over or cause the roofs to fall in. It can hardly be expected that the buildings can stand for another year.²³

Repairing the structures, he claimed, would be a “needless expenditure of time and money.” Furthermore, Enos urged the use of adobe construction,

which would last longer and be less expensive than cutting timber and hauling the logs “many miles over a rough road.”

Donaldson’s response was directed to Capt. Thomas Duncan, Burgwin’s commander:

I have read your letter and enclosures in reference to the insecure state of the public buildings at Cantonment Burgwin to the Department Commander, who directs me to say that there may be some intention of withdrawing the troops from many of the frontier posts, agreeably to the recommendation of the Army Board recently assembled at Washington; and under these circumstances he does not feel justified in ordering the building of new Quarters at Cantonment Burgwin. You are authorized, however, to repair the Quarters, and to take such measures as will secure them from the calamity apprehended in your letter.²⁴

At Cantonment Burgwin, Enos was replaced as acting assistant quartermaster in May by 1st Lt. Joseph Tilford. He submitted the annual estimate of funds for the fiscal year beginning 1 July 1859. Tilford requested one hundred thousand adobes at a cost of five hundred dollars, and thirty thousand feet of lumber at a cost of nine hundred dollars. In his accompanying report to Major General Jessup, quartermaster general in Washington, he repeated the concern voiced by Enos: “As to the general condition of all the buildings, I do not know that I could make a truer statement than that contained in the report of my predecessor, Lieut. Enos, of the 24th of March last.”²⁵ He attached a copy of Donaldson’s letter refusing further construction, while at the same time reporting on newly completed construction and asking for the adobes and lumber just mentioned. His report provides evidence for the construction of two buildings that were most recently excavated.

The Hospital

John Mansfield’s 1853 map (fig. 1) shows an office and dispensary. This original building was substantially altered within the next two years. In an inspection of all Department of New Mexico hospitals carried out in fall 1855, Asst. Surg. E. H. Abadie reported on the status of the facility at Burgwin: “The hospital built of logs with [a] flat dirt roof consists of only three rooms, the surgery, one ward for 6 beds, and a matron’s room.” He noted that the

ward and surgical room were apparently adequate, with “few sick having occurred in the command requiring hospital attendance.”²⁶ This description complements Anderson’s 1857 sketch.

Southern Methodist University’s excavations in 1967 revealed a much larger hospital structure and additional fireplaces (fig. 4, see next page).²⁷ Four wards made up the main structure, one of which was likely used for surgery, plus an attached kitchen/dispensary and surgeon’s/matron’s quarters. The small storeroom south of these four wards was made of small upright logs without mud and plaster finishing.

Some evidence proves that this final construction took place in the summer of 1859. Tilford’s 30 June 1859 communication to Quartermaster General Jessup offers details regarding the construction of the hospital: “You will see that I ask for funds for the purchase of 100,000 adobes for the purpose of building a new hospital with four sick wards, about 20 by 30 feet, a kitchen, matrons room and dispensary of about the same size.”²⁸ These specifications approximate the excavated structure. Although no correspondence indicating the actual date of this construction has been found, it must have been undertaken within a few months of Tilford’s request. The post was abandoned on 18 May 1860.

The adobe order was partially filled. While the new hospital wards were constructed with upright logs set in a trench, sealed with adobe, and roofed in earth-covered vigas — the same construction as most of the other buildings — the kitchen/dispensary and surgeon’s/matron’s quarters were constructed of adobe brick on a stone foundation (fig. 4).

Structure 6: Officers’ Quarters

While Mansfield’s 1853 plan shows a single structure between the dispensary and main fort compound (fig. 1), Anderson’s 1857 drawing depicts two structures. Mansfield’s structure is labeled “Store House,” while Anderson’s sketch shows that both structures have chimneys — suggesting that the storehouse was replaced with two new buildings.

The officers’ quarters, or structure 6, the building nearest the hospital, was excavated in 2001 and revealed duplex apartments on either side of a central hallway. Each apartment possessed an adobe fireplace on the south wall (fig. 5). The central hall had entries at both ends, a feature typical of Territorial style architecture. Anderson’s drawing shows a single chimney and no south entrance, so clearly this newer building dates after 1857.

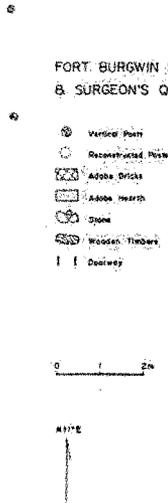
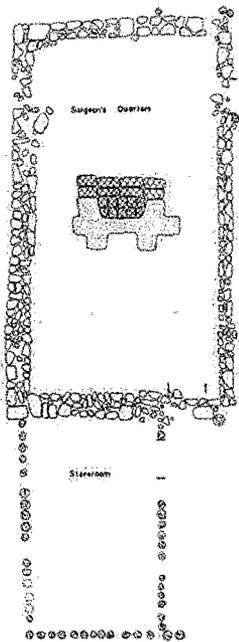
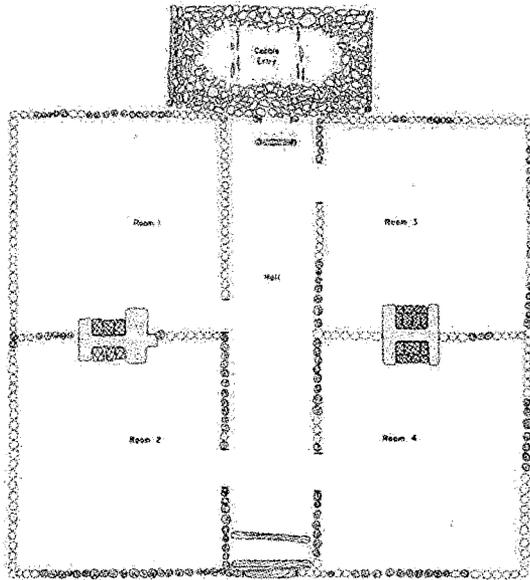


FIG. 4. HOSPITAL EXCAVATION MAP, CANTONMENT BURGWIN, 1967
(Courtesy Department of Anthropology, Southern Methodist University)

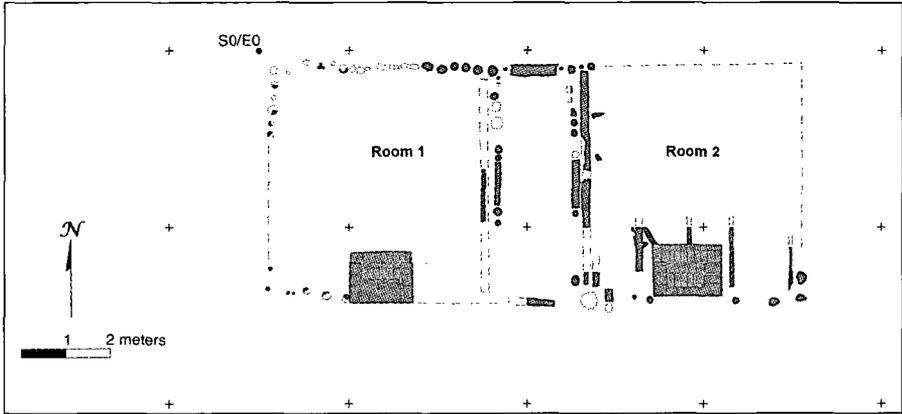


FIG. 5. EXCAVATION MAP OF OFFICERS' QUARTERS (STRUCTURE 6), CANTONMENT BURGWIN, 2001
(Courtesy Department of Anthropology, Southern Methodist University)

Once again, Tilford sheds light on the construction sequence. He details the construction completed within the previous three months:

Since the date of Lt. Enos's report the following improvements have been made: one set of officers quarters have been built on the same plan as all the other buildings here, that is, "jacal" or logs with one end in the ground and covered with timber and mud, with adobe chimneys; a good substantial bakehouse and oven built with adobes, and one set of company quarters has been re-covered, new "vegas" or rafters being substituted for the old and decayed ones that had begun to break and fall in to the great danger of the men's lives.²⁹

The officers' quarters he refers to is likely structure 6. It would have been built in 1859 between 24 March (Enos's report) and 30 June (Tilford's report). Tilford stated, "These are the only improvements worth mentioning that have been made here for over two years."³⁰ His declaration suggests that the hospital and adjacent residence depicted in Anderson's 1857 sketch were built no later than the summer of that year. Anderson arrived at Burgwin in November 1856, but was absent from the post from April through July 1857. He likely made this sketch either in February or March of 1857.

Structure 7: Butchering Yard or Storehouse

In the summer of 2002, structure 7, the building just south of structure 6, was excavated (fig. 6). It was an unroofed yard approximately thirty-five by forty-eight feet with an attached room, twelve by twelve feet, off the southwest corner. Three rooms made up the interior west wall. The largest of these rooms, at the northwest corner, had a fireplace. Previous archaeological testing—trenches and one-by-two-meter test pits—had obscured or destroyed much of the wall evidence, although sufficient walling remained to confirm the standard vertical log construction.



FIG. 6. EXCAVATION MAP OF BUTCHERING YARD (STRUCTURE 7),
CANTONMENT BURGWIN, 2002

(Courtesy Department of Anthropology, Southern Methodist
University)

Neither the yard floors nor the room floors consist of anything more than tamped earth. The size and spacing of many of the logs suggests that the perimeter wall was composed of pickets with no further sealing or finishing. A paucity of artifacts (no window glass, few nails) combined with abundant bone remains (mostly butchered cattle or oxen, and at least one mule), suggest that this structure served the quartermaster as a holding and butchering yard. Detailed bone and artifact analysis, however, has yet to be done.

In his 30 June 1859 letter to Quartermaster Jessup, Lieutenant Tilford requested adobes and lumber “for the purpose of building a new hospital” and “for the building of a safe store house for Commissary and Quartermaster’s property, said store to be about 30 feet by 80 with an office attached.” The thirty thousand feet of lumber would roof both of these new facilities and re-roof some existing buildings. “It is believed,” Tilford concluded, “that all other necessary buildings at this post can be either repaired or torn down and rebuilt of timber, without the purchase of further materials.”³¹

It is obvious that the adobes and lumber were not purchased, although no record of further correspondence on this matter has been found. It is very possible, therefore, that given available resources, structure 7 was the best that the command at Burgwin could construct at the time, and that this structure served at least part of the purposes called for in Tilford’s request.

Scarce Resources and Ingenuity

The trade-off between the labor-intensive felling, trimming, and hauling involved in log construction, and the easier, more substantial, but more expensive cost of adobe construction reflects the more general problem of scarcity in the frontier military during the 1850s. A reluctant Congress and cost-conscious War Department often viewed the Trans-Mississippi West as an unjustified siphon of funds and supplies. The use of civilian labor, such as in carpentry, blacksmithing, herding, and medical care, was at almost every turn a necessity, but it became so only after the use of military labor became demonstrably ineffective.

It was common to extract labor from soldiers in detention and to assign extra duty to troops between campaigns. Pvt. James A. Bennett was one of those who helped build Cantonment Burgwin. On 1 September 1852, he wrote: “Tools came yesterday and were put in working order. Men are now at work in good earnest.” One month later, he noted: “Houses are progressing well. Begins to grow cold nights. Men are in a hurry to sleep under cover.”³²

The improvements and repairs made in 1859 occurred as a result of the labor of soldiers. All of the work, wrote Tilford, “was performed by prisoners and fatigue parties except part of the mason and carpenters work, executed by men on extra duty.”³³ Milled lumber was scarce and expensive, yet plank floors were considered a necessity at most posts. Much of Burgwin’s flooring consisted of dressed planks nailed to joists laid on the ground surface.

As the Civil War drew close, funds diminished throughout the department and buildings in need of repair suffered greatly. Even Fort Union felt the squeeze. On 23 August 1859, Capt. Robert M. Morris, commander at Fort Union, appealed for help to the acting assistant adjutant general at department headquarters in Santa Fe. Company quarters “are not habitable for troops now or for the approaching winter,” he wrote. “I respectfully request that orders be given to the Post Quartermaster to make this Post habitable, with authority to employ such citizen mechanics as in his judgment he may deem necessary.”³⁴

That repairs and new construction somehow were accomplished is testimony to the ingenuity of post commanders, and the legendary ability of quartermasters to somehow acquire supplies amid scarcity. Even in its final days and deteriorating condition, the cantonment was a source of scarce materials. On the day of evacuation, 18 May 1860, Burgwin’s commander, Capt. Thomas Duncan, was sent this brief note from the acting assistant adjutant general at Santa Fe:

The Department Commander desires me to direct you to make such arrangements as shall be necessary to leave an intelligent and competent Sgt in charge of the public property at Cant Burgwin, until such time as an officer can be sent to that post.³⁵

Duncan was already at Fort Union when the expressman delivered the message. On 22 May, he responded:

I left at Burgwin a Sargent and three privates of Co. A 3rd Inf. who were sent there in charge of their Company property. I charged the Sgt. strictly to allow no damage to be done to the quarters, and not to allow anything to be carried away. If, after this information the Col. commanding the Dept. still wishes an “intelligent and competent Sergeant” there I can send one back. But in that case, I would respectfully suggest the propriety of sending at least two good men with him.³⁶

The property was still there on 13 August when the department assistant adjutant general ordered Lt. William Kearney, at Fort Union, to Burgwin “until the public property there can be removed or disposed of.” There was little left to use “besides the window and door frames, which Colonel Canby will probably require in making the addition to the quarters at Fort Garland, which he is about to command.”³⁷ At least some of Cantonment Burgwin apparently survived in other places. After a colorful but troubled history, this was the unceremonious demise of Cantonment Burgwin.

The army maintained a garrison in Taos well into the spring of 1861, under command of Bvt. Maj. Henry H. Sibley and his Second Dragoons, while the ruins of Cantonment Burgwin were systematically reclaimed by the elements and human scavengers. It would be nearly a century before it was rediscovered and its short history partially revealed through archaeology.³⁸

Notes

1. For further details of the policy changes affecting Sumner’s command, see Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848–1865* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 78–90.
2. Chester L. Kieffer, *Maligned General: The Biography of Thomas Sidney Jessup* (San Rafael, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1979), 301.
3. *Ibid.*, 302.
4. Conrad to Sumner, 1 April 1851, in United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, *The Official Correspondence of James S. Calhoun While Indian Agent at Santa Fe and Superintendent of Indian Affairs in New Mexico*, ed. Annie Heloise Abel (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1915), 383.
5. *Ibid.*, 384.
6. Sumner to Adj. Gen. Roger Jones, 24 October 1851, r. 1, *Letters Sent by the Ninth Military Department, Department of New Mexico, and the District of New Mexico, 1849–1890*, Microcopy 1072 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1980), Records of U.S. Army Continental Commands, 1821–1920, Record Group 393, National Archives [hereafter M number, RG number, NA]. The garrison in Taos was not immune to licentiousness. On 12 January 1850, Col. Benjamin L. Beall, commanding, issued the order: “Hereafter no non-commissioned officer or soldier will be permitted to visit the Fonda [a local hotel/saloon] or Billiard room after retreat for any purpose whatever.” Special Order 1, *Don Fernando de Taos Garrison*, 12 January 1850, r. 1, *Register of Letters Received, and Letters Received by Headquarters, Ninth Military Department, 1848–1853*, M1102 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1982), RG393, NA.
7. Sumner to Robert Ransom Jr., 10 August 1852, r. 1, M1072, RG393, NA.
8. Sumner to Ransom, 24 August 1852, r. 1, M1072, RG393, NA.

9. James A. Bennett, *Forts and Forays, James A. Bennett: A Dragoon in New Mexico, 1850–1856*, ed. Clinton E. Brooks and Frank D. Reeve (1948; reprint, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 40.
10. Joseph King Fenno Mansfield, *Mansfield on the Condition of the Western Forts, 1853–1854*, ed. Robert W. Frazer (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 38–40.
11. Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, from its Organization, September 29, 1789, to March 2, 1903*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1903), 1:165.
12. Post Returns, Taos, New Mexico, September 1848–March 1861, r. 1254, *Returns from U.S. Military Posts, 1800–1916*, M617D (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1968), Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, RG92, NA.
13. Nichols to Blake, 27 October 1853, r. 1, M1072, RG393, NA.
14. Blake to Nichols, 6 November 1853, r. 4, M1120, RG393, NA.
15. For a discussion of campaigns against the Utes and Apaches, see Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, 142–74.
16. Robert W. Frazer, *Forts and Supplies: The Role of the Army in the Economy of the Southwest, 1846–1861* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), 88.
17. Lt. S. D. Sturgis to Ransom, 22 May 1853, r. 1, M1072, RG393, NA.
18. Ransom to Sumner, 24 October 1852, r. 5, M1102, RG393, NA.
19. Sumner to Ransom, 5 November 1852, r. 1, M1072, RG393, NA.
20. Nichols to Ransom, 2 September 1853, r. 1, M1072, RG393, NA.
21. At the direction of General Garland, Nichols wrote, “The Dept. Commander directs that you send up to Ft. Mass. without delay, one of the best carpenters that you have (citizen) with directions to report to the C.O. of that post.” Nichols to Capt. H. B. Schroeder, 29 May 1858, r. 2, M1072, RG393, NA.
22. McCook to Jessup, 1 October 1857, *Selected Documents from the Quartermaster General Consolidated File concerning Cantonment Burgwin, New Mexico*, RG92, NA.
23. Enos to Donaldson, 24 March 1859, *Selected Documents from the Quartermaster General Consolidated File concerning Cantonment Burgwin, New Mexico*, RG92, NA.
24. Donaldson to Duncan, 23 April 1859, *Selected Documents from the Quartermaster General Consolidated File concerning Cantonment Burgwin, New Mexico*, RG92, NA.
25. Tilford to Jessup, 30 June 1859, *Selected Documents from the Quartermaster General Consolidated File concerning Cantonment Burgwin, New Mexico*, RG92, NA.
26. Abadie to William A. Nichols, 9 December 1855, r. 4, M1120, RG393, NA.
27. This larger hospital was built in the Territorial style, as were the duplex officers’ quarters bordering the parade ground (see fig. 5). See Agnesa Lufkin Reeve, *From Hacienda to Bungalow: Northern New Mexico Houses, 1850–1912* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 15–16, fig. 7; 55, fig. 35.
28. Tilford to Jessup, 30 June 1859, *Selected Documents from the Quartermaster General Consolidated File concerning Cantonment Burgwin, New Mexico*, RG92, NA.

29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Brooks and Reeves, eds., *Forts and Forays*, 40. Bennett's description of the fort, however, is in error. He claims that the buildings were constructed of adobe, and that the flat roofs had parapets with "port holes" for firing. Neither was the case.
33. Tilford to Jessup, 30 June 1859, *Selected Documents from the Quartermaster General Consolidated File concerning Cantonment Burgwin, New Mexico*, RG92, NA.
34. Morris to Lt. J. D. Wilkins, 23 August 1859, r. 9, M1120, RG393, NA.
35. Lt. O. G. Wagner to Duncan, 18 May 1860, r. 2, M1072, RG393, NA.
36. Duncan to Lt. O. G. Wagner, 22 May 1860, r. 2, M1072, RG393, NA.
37. Capt. D. H. Maury to Kearney, 13 August 1860, r. 2, M1072, RG393, NA.
38. For an excellent description of the personnel and events at Cantonment Burgwin during its tempestuous history, see Lawrence R. Murphy, "Cantonment Burgwin, New Mexico: 1852-1860," *Arizona and the West* 15 (spring 1973): 5-26.