

☆NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

The Search for Authenticity at Historic Fort Gibson

*By Thom Rosenblum**

For the past two years, the Oklahoma Historical Society's Division of Museums and Sites has been collecting documentary materials relating to the structural history of Fort Gibson. To date, over 200 letters, reports, endorsements, and other documents containing descriptive references to the fort at various periods in its history have been collected and transcribed.

The buildings and defenses of what is today commonly referred to as the Fort Gibson Stockade were constructed over a four-year period beginning in 1824, shortly after the arrival of Colonel Matthew Arbuckle and five companies of the Seventh Infantry. The following document was extracted from a letter located in the Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General (Record Group 94, National Archives and Records Service). It describes the appearance of Fort Gibson a little over a year after Arbuckle's arrival. Written by Major William Davenport, Seventh Infantry, who superintended the construction endeavors between July 1, 1824, and June 15, 1825, the letter is believed to be the earliest recorded description of the post.

Washington Octr. 20th. 1825

Sir

For your information I have the honor to state that the garrison at cantonment Gibson is in a considerable state of forwardness, at least the command is in good & comfortable quarters. The work is upon a large scale, being a square of 90 by 100 yards.¹ Three sides of the square are but one story, the fourth is intended to be two, but when I left the station in June last it was raised to but one. The foundation is of stone raised to a level quite sound, and the chimnies are of the same material and built in a substantial manner. The block houses will be placed at the two most distant corners, one of them making two curtains of the work. The Magazine will be placed in the line with the Barracks, and secured in such a manner as to leave nothing to apprehend from fire. The Barracks

¹ This measurement refers only to the quadrangle formed by the blocks of quarters within the pickets. The total dimensions of the fort, including the pickets and block houses which were raised in 1826, were given as 108 by 106 yards. Captain Charles O. Collins to Colonel Henry Stanton, August 23, 1845/Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General. Consolidated Correspondence Files, Fort Gibson, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington.

THE CHRONICLES OF OKLAHOMA

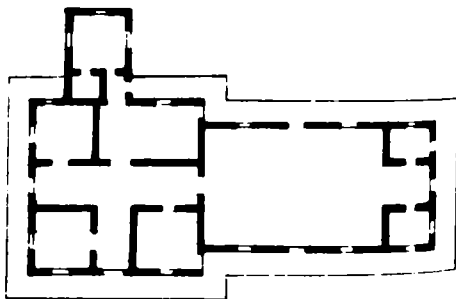
are 18 feet wide, divided in such a way as to give each company, including the officers belonging to it, six rooms.² You will observe that the works is quite spacious, and that the quarters allotted each company is ample. Experience has led us to believe that in a southern climate to secure the great object, health, it is necessary.

With great respect
I am Sir
your obt servt.

Genl.
Thos. S. Jesup
Q Mast. Genl
Washington

Wm Davenport
Maj. U.S. Army

The Fort Gibson Research Project also has collected approximately fifty maps and plans of the post, military reserve, and individual buildings, ranging in date from 1835 to 1888. The illustrations below were taken from an 1871 plan of the second fort. Unlike many of the maps and plans, particularly those of the pre-Civil War era, which tend to contain inaccuracies, the 1871 depiction compares favorably with written descriptions of the post and the results of archaeological investigations and examinations of a number of the buildings which are still standing. Museum staff use such illustrations in renovation of structures and in the development of interpretive exhibits.



² Generally, the individual rooms comprising the different blocks of quarters, offices, store rooms, etc., were eighteen feet wide by twenty-two feet long, with the exception of seven rooms originally built as officer's kitchens which were only sixteen feet in length. Brevet Brigadier General Matthew Arbuckle to Major General Roger Jones, February 12, 1835/Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General. Consolidated Correspondence Files, Fort Gibson, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington.

* Thom Rosenblum is the Curator in Charge of Research for the Society's Division of Museums and Sites and is coordinating the Fort Gibson research project.