

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL
INVESTIGATIONS IN THE SOUTH BARRACKS,
FORT WASHITA, BRYAN COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

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INTRODUCTION

The following pages present an initial summary of archaeological investigations undertaken in 1971 at the South Barracks building of Fort Washita, Bryan County, Oklahoma. A detailed study of the work and its findings is presently underway, and a thorough presentation of what was done and what was found will be forthcoming. In lieu of the final report, this brief synopsis has been prepared so that the overall results of the work are now available.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Fort Washita investigations described herein are a cooperative venture between the Oklahoma Historical Society and the Oklahoma Archaeological Survey. It is entirely fitting that these two agencies should be working together since both have been entrusted with the responsibility of constructive study and preservation of a unique natural resource, the locations pertaining to Oklahoma's historical and prehistoric past. The success of these investigations reflects the interest and cooperation of a number of individuals, and it is a pleasure to recognize and acknowledge these persons. Certainly this work would not have been possible if it were not for the interest, support, and assistance of persons on the staff of the Oklahoma Historical Society; Mr. Elmer Fraker, Mr. Mike Bureman, and Mrs. Martha Blaine were instrumental in the achievements of this undertaking. A debt of gratitude is also expressed to Dr. Muriel H. Wright for allowing use of documents and records which she had collected that pertain to the construction and habitation history of Fort Washita. Appreciation is also expressed to Mr. James Fricke and Mr. Jim Carol of the Fort Washita staff for their patience and assistance throughout the field work. A special word of thanks goes to Tommy Benton who has labored diligently throughout the project to move

dirt and rocks with everything from a brush to a shovel.

THE 1971 INVESTIGATIONS AND THEIR OBJECTIVES

The site of old Fort Washita is now owned by the Oklahoma Historical Society. In an effort to enhance the interpretive presentation of the site, the Society has planned to restore some of the original buildings. The first structure considered for such restoration is the stone barracks which forms the south end of the parade ground. By general consensus this structure has been designated as the South Barracks.

Much of the South Barracks was still standing in the early 1900's, and subsequent to the Society's ownership of the fort, the rock walls of the first story were rebuilt. However, prior to any complete restoration, it was obvious that many details pertaining to the structure and its architecture were lacking. Some such details could be obtained from a careful study of existing military and civilian documents which describe the fort and its operation. Such documents are available and have been utilized with appreciable results, but there was also a need for the controlled field excavations which could reveal potentially important information *in situ* to supplement that data gleaned from the written documents. On the basis of both pertinent documents and archaeological excavations, the background could be developed for any eventual restoration of the building.

Personnel of the Oklahoma Historical Society and the Oklahoma Archaeological Survey visited Fort Washita and inspected the South Barracks. Subsequent consultations between these persons resulted in the agreement that excavations were feasible and could result in some information potentially significant for the eventual reconstruction of this building. At a meeting held on April 7, 1971, Mr. Elmer Fraker (Administrative Secretary of the Historical Society), Mrs. Martha Blaine (Chief Curator of the Historical Society), Mr. Don Wyckoff (State Archaeologist of the University of Oklahoma), and Mr. Towana Spivey (a student archaeologist) agreed to cooperate in undertaking such work. The main objectives for archaeological

excavations of the South Barracks were twofold: 1) exposure of any details pertinent to an architectural reconstruction of the building; 2) exposure and recovery of any artifacts pertinent to the 19th century usage of the building and the habitation of the fort.

Excavations of the South Barracks began on April 12, 1971, and continued for four weeks. The excavation procedure included establishment of horizontal grids composed of five-foot squares and the excavation of the squares with trowels and shovels. The fill dirt was usually screened when it was possible to associate fill with a context relating to the 19th century usage of this building. Materials found in each square were placed in labeled sacks; these materials are now being cleaned and catalogued and will be analyzed and reported upon in the final report. The excavations were conducted on both interior and exterior areas of the building, and a number of features were found. A detailed map of the building was made (Fig. 1a), and all associated architectural features exposed by the field work have been incorporated into this map.

FINDINGS OF THE 1971 EXCAVATIONS IN THE SOUTH BARRACKS

Results of the 1971 archaeological investigations are listed and briefly discussed below. In most instances, the respective discussions are related to a photograph taken of the particular architectural feature as it was exposed.

General Statement

It can be confirmed that the South Barracks building is the structure built in 1849 for infantry quarters. The excavations exposed a sufficient number of features to indicate an extremely close correlation between the map of the existing structure (Fig. 1a) and a plan for "New Infantry Quarters at Fort Washita, C.N." found in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. The plans called for a long, rectangular building of two stories (first of stone and second of wooden frame). The first story was to be composed of two large rectangular rooms (kitchen-mess rooms) separated by a

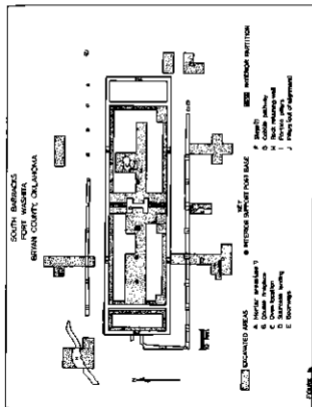


FIGURE 1 a

partition in which a double fireplace occurs. At each end of this first story were to be small, rectangular root-house rooms. Surrounding this first story was to occur a portico with pillars to support a frame portico associated with the wooden second story. The dimensions of the existing structure are not exactly comparable to those on the plans; the existing structure is shorter and more narrow. But, in terms of number of rooms, their sequence, and other associated features, the existing South Barracks compares quite favorably to the plans. The minor discrepancies in size suggest the plans were altered to suit the space situation and needs at Fort Washita. There are no other visible structures at the fort which compare in outline and room sequence to the plans from the national Archives.

General Construction Details

1. The structure was built on a southwest facing slope of a hill with the structure itself being oriented east-west (Fig. 2a). To compensate for the slope, a trench (Fig. 2b) was dug for the foundation and a one to two-inch layer of mortar was poured in which to lay the first run of foundation stones. There was apparently some concern about moisture collecting at the southwest (lowest) corner of the building, so a drain hole was chipped into one of the rocks in the first run of the foundation (Fig. 2c). Because of the slope, the walls at the west end had to be much higher than at the east end (Fig. 1b), and to correct the sloping natural floor, the entire interior was backfilled with dirt and gravel. This fill was capped with some 12-14 inches of packed, red clay which formed the floor. Before this floor was laid, the interior partition in the mess room area was built and the interior walls were apparently plastered.
2. Subsequent to the construction of the main structure's walls, the portico was added. A series of rock-mortar pillars were built at regularly spaced intervals some 8 feet outside the structure (Fig. 1a and 2d). Then the intervening space between these pillars was rocked in. Finally, the space between the portico wall and the

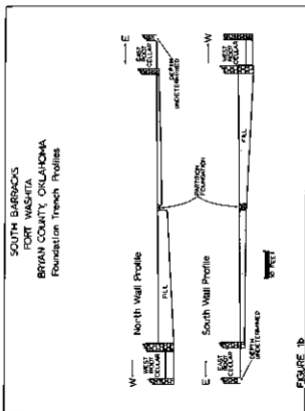


FIGURE 1 b



3. The Smith Barracks at Fort Washita as viewed from the E-SW corner ca. 1940 work. Debris hole exposed in base of foundation. Found in S wall of 0-85.



5. East wall profile at trench through S pierce. Dotted line traces profile of original pier dug for foundation.

6. Portico wall at SW corner of building. Note portico pillars and of separate construction from portico wall.



FIGURE 2



3b. Rock bases for interior supports found in center of west kitchen-mess room.



4. Looking N at mortar-rock base for worm locust found in E kitchen-mess room.



3a. Double fireplace and partition between the two kitchen-mess rooms. View looking north.



3c. Eastern-most rock base for interior support in W kitchen-mess room. Note offset chipped in rock for possible laying of floor.

FIGURE 3

structure wall was backfilled with dirt and gravel (Fig. 2b).

Interior Construction Details

1. The root cellar walls were built at the same time as the structure's exterior walls. The west root cellar has a stepped offset along the east wall; this feature is suggestive of the presence of a low loft.
2. The kitchen-mess rooms were of comparable size and were separated by a low rock partition which also incorporated a double fireplace (Fig. 3a). This partition wall apparently projected only a slight distance above the floor and was probably the base for a wooden wall between the rooms (Fig. 3a). Doorways in this partition were not discerned by the excavations, and it is possible the mess rooms were closed off from each other.
3. The double fireplace in the interior partition was the only open fireplace in the structure.
4. Rock pillar bases on mortar bases were found at regular intervals running down the center of the building (Figs. 1a and 3b). These bases supported pillars, probably wooden, which braced the joist of the second floor. The sequence and spacing of these pillars was best exposed in the west mess-room (see Fig. 1a); those in the east room were largely destroyed by 20th century usage of this structure as a barn.
5. A probable oven location, demarked by a mortared area and baked clay, was exposed in the northwest part of the east mess-room (Figs. 1a and 3d). This location measured some 5 feet in length and 2½ feet in width.

Exterior Construction Details

1. The portico apparently did surround the structure except, perhaps, at the east end. Pillars did occur at the



b. Base of massive pillar (thick from northeast corner of building).

d. Step-like area and cobble pathway exposed S of courtyard on S portico.



a. Staircase base exposed in trench projecting out from 3^d doorway.

c. Looking S at exposed section of rock retaining wall present to SW of building.

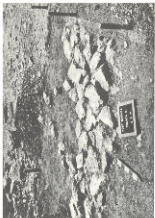


FIGURE 4

east end but only on a general alignment with the north and south portico walls and not across the east end.

2. The portico was constructed by building rock-mortar pillars every 10-15 feet apart (Figs. 2d and 4b). A rock wall was then built to connect these pillars. Subsequently the space between the portico wall and the structure wall was backfilled with dirt and gravel.
3. Trenches were dug out from each of the four doorways in an attempt to locate the bases for the stairways to the second floor. Such staircase landings were exposed at a point 10 feet out from the portico wall out from the northwest and southwest doorways (Fig. 1a). These landings were small rectangular areas of mortar and rock (Fig. 4a). The existence of such landings out from the northeast and southeast doors is suspected though the excavations failed to reveal their exact location.
4. A trench excavated off the northwest corner of the structure revealed the presence of a rock retaining wall (Fig. 4c). This feature is of significance because historical records tell of problems with runoff eroding the foundation of the barracks.
5. Segments of a cobble pavement were exposed extending south from the center point of the south portico wall. A few rocks mortared into the portico wall are suggestive of steps built at this point (Fig. 4d).

Recovered Artifacts

Quite a variety of metal, china, and glass artifacts were recovered during the excavations. Some of these relate to the 20th century usage of this structure as a stable. Others relate to the 19th century utilization of the fort. Among the latter are military buttons, musket balls, percussion caps, sections of shovels used in digging the structure location, and square nails. The only coin found was a 1911 Liberty nickel. All artifacts are now being cleaned and prepared for analysis in the final report.

General Comments Regarding Restoration

1. Exposure of the foundation walls on their interior (see Fig. 1a) revealed a few large cracks. The stability of these walls should be insured prior to any reconstruction.
2. Interior features, including partition wall, double fireplace, and rock bases for interior supports, are structural features which should be accounted for in any accurate reconstruction.
3. The exterior portico is generally in good shape. Some joints will need repointing and a slight amount of wall reconstruction will be needed to maintain the authentic appearance of this structure.
4. Little data was recovered pertaining to the nature of the second story. Interior support post bases and the portico pillars attest to its presence. The reconstruction of the second story will have to depend heavily on available documentary evidence.