A Guide to the Virginia Manufactory of Arms Records, 1798-1864

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History

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Descriptive Summary

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Physical Characteristics

26 feet, 11 inches, and 13 volumes (approximate 13,000 items)

Physical Location

State Records Collection, Auditor of Public Accounts (Record Group 48)

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

Transferred from the Office of the Auditor of Public Accounts in 1913.

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Biographical/Historical Information

MANUFACORY OF ARMS: The Virginia Manufactory of Arms was established by an act passed by the General Assembly on 23 January 1798. The manufactory, which served as an armory as well, opened in Richmond in 1802 and reached full operating capacity by 1809. Its purpose was to furnish the state's militia with standard muskets, pistols, swords, and bayonets. It did its job so well that in December 1822 the General Assembly voted to close it, in part because of an economic recession and the increased use of weapons provided by the federal government. The building fell into disrepair until the machinery from the Harpers Ferry armory was installed in 1861 and the manufactory was leased to the Confederate government. In 1865 the structure was gutted during the Richmond evacuation fire. The remaining walls were pulled down in 1900.

The Virginia Manufactory of Arms produced and repaired thousands of weapons and employed hundreds of artisans. Two supervisors - John Clarke (1798-1808) and John Staples (1809-1821) - oversaw the operations of the factory.

AUDITOR OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS: Although the colonial government had appointed auditors general from time to time, the office was not established on a permanent basis until after independence was declared. At its first session, which convened on 7 October 1776, the General Assembly passed an act creating a board of three auditors to examine and settle claims concerning receipts and expenditures for military purposes. The confusing financial situation of the state, however, resulted in a series of acts being passed over the next fifteen years elaborating and refining the duties of the auditors. Finally, at its session begun in November 1791, the General Assembly passed an act that combined the duties of the board of auditors and the solicitor general, whose office had been created in 1785 to settle the accounts of the state with the United States, and assigned them to a single auditor of public accounts effective 1 January 1792. The auditor soon became the most powerful fiscal officer in the state. All receipts and disbursements were made only upon his warrant to the treasurer, and his books were the standard against which those of the treasurer were checked.

The first changes were made as the accounts of the revolutionary era were settled. As the state moved into a period of steady financial and governmental growth in the nineteenth century, the number of accounts and funds maintained by the auditor became excessive. Thus, on 24 February 1823 the General Assembly passed an act creating the office of the second auditor to ease the auditor's burden. Although the second auditor handled several large special funds, the auditor continued to be responsible for most of the accounts concerning the daily operation of state government.

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During the Civil War both the state government and the pro-Union Restored Government of Virginia, which was based first in Wheeling and then in Alexandria, had auditors of public accounts. After the war, near the end of Reconstruction, the military authorities appointed Major Thaddeus H. Stanton, of the United States

Army, as auditor of public accounts. Stanton was paid by the state during his service from 3 April 1869 to 12 February 1870, although he remained an army officer. The position was returned to civilian control on 12 February 1870 with the election of William F. Taylor as auditor by the General Assembly.

Following the Civil War the complexities of an increasingly sophisticated financial world threatened to overwhelm the state fiscal offices, which had changed their practices but little since the end of the eighteenth century. Inadequate bookkeeping procedures and embezzlements of state funds resulted in a public demand for corrective action. It was not until a state government reorganization act was passed by the General Assembly on 18 April 1927, however, that the demand was satisfied. Effective 1 March 1928 the office of auditor of public accounts and second auditor were abolished and replaced by the office of comptroller--head of the Department of Accounts--to monitor the receipt and disbursement of state funds, and a new office of auditor of public accounts, under the General Assembly, to audit state and local government agencies.

The records of the first auditor of public accounts have not survived intact; periodically they have been subjected to disarrangement or destruction. When the auditor's office was created in 1776, Virginia's seat of government was in Williamsburg. In 1780, when the capital was moved to Richmond, the auditors and their records also moved. At this time, and during Benedict Arnold's raid on Richmond in 1781, some auditor's records were misplaced or destroyed. During the War of 1812, when it was believed that British troops were marching on Richmond, the state's records were loaded onto wagons and hauled to the James River for transportation upstream. Before the boats sailed, however, the alarm proved false and the records were unloaded and returned to the State Capitol.

The next threat to the auditor's records came on the night of 2-3 April 1865, when the evacuation fire broke out as the Confederate garrison abandoned the city. Fortunately, the auditor's records escaped the flames because they were stored in the basement and attic of the State Capitol, which did not burn. Following the capture of Richmond by Union troops, however, a detachment of the Twentieth New York Infantry Regiment served as a guard in the Capitol building and browsed through the records of the state's fiscal offices (sometimes recording candid opinions concerning the late Confederacy in the margins of ledgers and journals). After the state library building was completed on the east side of Capitol Square in the late 1890's the auditor's office moved into it and the older records were stored in the basement. There they remained until 1913, when they were transferred to the custody of the state library.

Scope and Content Information

This series contains the following operational records of the armory: Account Books, 1811-1821, 33 vols.; Armory Building: Construction and Maintenance Vouchers, 1799-1811 (1 ft. 10 in.), Foundry: Vouchers, 1806-1809 (3 in.), Reports, 1801-1811 (2 in.); Artisans: Payrolls, Receipts, and Vouchers, 1798-1810, 3 ft. 9 in.; General Vouchers, 1800-1828, 6 ft. 3 in.; Gun Carriages and Repair of Arms, Receipts and Vouchers, 1812-1827, 1 ft. 8 in.; Repair of Arms, Armory, and Military Equipment, Receipts and Vouchers, 1830-1864, 2 ft. 6 in.; Warrants, 1798-1810, 1 in.

This series contains the following records of the office of the superintendent: Ledger, 1809-1811, 1 vol.; Vouchers, 1809-1821, 10 ft. 5 in.

Arrangement

Organized into sub-series by subject or form, arranged chronologically thereunder.