

A Guide to the Virginia Engineer Department Records, 1861-1865

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1861-1865

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Physical Location

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Repository

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Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Parts of the Virginia Engineer Department Records, 1861-1865, are digitized and available through [Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection](#) on the Library of Virginia website. Please use digital images where possible.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

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Biographical/Historical Information

On January 29, 1861, the General Assembly passed an act appropriating one million dollars for the defense of the Commonwealth. This act called for the employment of a competent engineer for the purpose of planning and constructing such coast, harbor, and river defenses as are immediately needed for the protection of the commonwealth. Later, the Virginia Engineer Department, or Engineer Corps, was formed by an ordinance of the Virginia Convention on April 24, 1861. The Corps was to consist of one colonel, one lieutenant colonel, two majors, six captains, two first lieutenants, and two second lieutenants. In addition, two companies of sappers and miners were attached to the corps. Colonel Andrew Talcott, whose headquarters was in Richmond, served as head of the Department.

Scope and Content Information

The records of the Engineer Dept. include an account book, correspondence, indexes, invoices, letters received, letters sent, a material book, pay rolls, property returns, slave rolls, vouchers, and other sundry items. The correspondence contains both incoming and outgoing letters belonging to Col. Andrew Talcott, Chief Engineer, between 1861 and 1864. Talcott corresponded with Walter Gwynn, Major General of the Commanding Forces in Norfolk Harbor; T.M.R. Talcott, Capt. of Engineers, C.S.A. Engineer Bureau; James Maurice, 1st Lt. Acting Paymaster; William B. Belden, 1st Lt. Engineers; Gen. Robert E. Lee, Commander of Virginia Forces; and Governor John Letcher. There is correspondence related to the Engineer Dept.'s removal of state documents to Lynchburg from June-October 1862. Note, that this correspondence is not indexed and is filed separately from the Letters Sent & Letters Received. Another useful item is a "catalogue" of the Virginia Engineers Office from May 8-Dec. 1, 1861, which lists the officers of the Engineer Dept., rank, date assigned, where assigned, and in what capacity. There are numbered invoices that document items purchased by the Engineer Dept. in 1861. Also included is a statement of pay rolls and accounts of the Norfolk Division for July-September 1861, as well as a returns of property. An inventory lists tools on hand for the Richmond defenses on Nov. 1, 1861. Lists of free hands, slaves, and free negroes employed can also be found. Particularly useful is a descriptive list of works constructed by the state of Virginia for defensive purposes under the direction of Col. Talcott.

Account Book, May 8, 1861-June 4, 1862. Records the expenses of the Commonwealth for coast, harbor, and river defenses. Accounts provide the date, person or company who rendered the goods or services, an itemized list of the goods or services, and the cost. A loose volume in the front of the ledger includes an index to vouchers contained in the account book.

Index to Letters Received & Index to Letters Sent, March-December 1861. Consists of two volumes one of which serves as an index to Letters Received (A & B) by Col. Andrew Talcott and the Engineer Department and the other as an index to Letters Sent. The indices contain an alphabetical list of correspondence including a number, date, name of correspondent, synopsis of the letter, and subject.

Letters Received A & B, 1861. Contains mostly correspondence to Col. Andrew Talcott, Chief Engineer of the Engineer Department. Talcott received correspondence from the same individuals mentioned below. In addition, there are a few miscellaneous records such as engineering plans and drawings, invoices, and lists of free hands. Each letter includes a number written on the top right-hand corner. There are two sets of letters received labeled "A" & "B". There is an index to letters received (See above) that provides the name of the correspondent and a synopsis of each letter. There can also be found engineering plans interspersed within the correspondence.

Letters Sent, May 14-May 3, 1862. Includes three letter books two of which represent the work of Chief Engineer, Col. Andrew Talcott, and the third represents the work of 1st Lt. James Maurice, Acting Paymaster of the Engineering Dept. Col. Andrew Talcott's letter books, May 14, 1861 - January 8, 1862, contain correspondence to John J. Clarke, Assistant Engineer; Alfred L. Rives, Capt. of Virginia Engineers and Assistant to the Chief; George Arnold, Chief Clerk of the Engineering Dept.; R. S. Garnett, Adjutant General; Gen. Robert E. Lee, Commander of Virginia Forces; Col. George W. Munford, Secretary of the Commonwealth; and Governor John Letcher. This correspondence relates to special orders, defenses of Richmond and Norfolk, recommendations, commissions, etc. The letter book of James Maurice, August 21, 1861 - May 3, 1862, includes correspondence to Col. Andrew Talcott, Col. George W. Munford, Joseph T. Randolph, Lt. T..M. R. Talcott from the Norfolk Dept., et al. This correspondence relates to accounts, payments, receipts, and other financial matters. All three letter books are indexed in the front of the volumes.

Material Book, June 4-October 26, 1861. Volume contains an alphabetical account of materials purchased by the Engineer Department. The volume provides the type of material, date received or delivered, date account was paid, quality or type of material, quantity, price, and cost. A separate volume serves as an index.

Pay Rolls, May-October 1861. This box contains pay rolls of persons employed on fortifications. The pay rolls identify the worker, occupation, time employed, rate of pay, amount of pay, deductions, and net amount of pay. These individuals were employed to work on the defenses at Fort Boykin, Fort Huger, Fort Lowry, Gloucester Point, Hardy's Bluff, Jamestown Island, Lowry's Point, Mulberry Island, West Point, Williamsburg, and Yorktown. Also included are individuals employed at the Engineer Dept. headquarters in Richmond. These pay rolls also include separate rolls of free negroes. Note that there are additional pay rolls included with the vouchers.

Slave Rolls, May-October 1861. Contains pay rolls of slaves employed for coast, harbor, and river defenses. The slave rolls provide the name from whom the slave was hired, the name of the slave, time employed, rate of pay, amount for each slave, deductions, net amount, and amount received. Slaves were employed to work on the defenses at Fort Boykin, Fort Huger, Fort Lowry, Gloucester Point, Hardy's Bluff, Jamestown Island, Lowry's Point, Mulberry Island, Williamsburg, and Yorktown.

Vouchers, Quarter Ending March 1862. Contains 158 numbered vouchers belonging to 1st Lt. James Maurice, Acting Paymaster of the Engineer Dept. The vouchers document expenses such as lumber, food, services of a draughtsman, laborers, etc., occurring between January 1 & March 31, 1862. Included are nearly 100 additional payrolls of sundry persons employed on fortifications between April & September 1861 (See also Pay Rolls). The vouchers include date of payment, to whom paid, nature of purchase or expenditure, and amount. There is an abstract of disbursements at the front of these records which summarizes the information from the vouchers.

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