

A Guide to the Virginia Commandant of the Public Guard, Lexington Arsenal Records, 1817-1829

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Library of Virginia

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History

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Descriptive Summary

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36735

Language

English

Physical Characteristics

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Physical Location

State Records Collection, Virginia Dept. of Military Affairs (Record Group 46).

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

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No acquisition information available.

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Historical Information

On 22 January 1801, in the wake of Gabriel's Insurrection, the General Assembly passed an act to establish a guard in the City of Richmond. The act decreed that the governor and Council enlist a company of sixty-eight men, including three commissioned officers, to act as a guard for the protection of public property in Richmond. In addition, the act ordered all arms & military stores to be removed from the Point of Fork Arsenal in Fluvanna County to Richmond. The Public Guard was quartered at barracks on the southwest corner of Capitol Square until the construction of the Bell Tower in 1824. Part of the guard was also quartered at the Penitentiary and Manufactory of Arms.

Alexander Quarrier was appointed the first commandant of the Public Guard by Governor James Monroe on 10 February 1801. Peter Crutchfield, who served as lieutenant of the Public Guard, replaced Quarrier as commandant between 1811 and 1817. Blair Bolling also played an important role as commandant serving in that capacity from 1818 until his death in 1839. During Bolling's tenure, the duties of the Adjutant General as Superintendent of Public Edifices were transferred to the Commandant of the Public Guard by an act of the General Assembly on 6 March 1821. In addition, the positions of Superintendent of the Armory and Commandant of the Public Guard merged as a result of the closure of the Virginia Manufactory of Arms in Richmond on 1 January 1822. On 23 February 1822, the General Assembly passed an act providing for the repairs of the Armory and the preservation of the public arms. The Commandant of the Public Guard received the additional duties of packing and arranging the arms in the Armory subject to the inspection of the Adjutant General. He was also charged with the preservation of the Armory and its appendages, and of the arms of every description in the armory, and to make returns of the arms as required by the executive. Bolling was replaced by John B. Richardson who was in turn replaced by Charles Dimmock upon his death in 1843. The Public Guard remained in the Armory until the building was destroyed by the Richmond evacuation fire of 1865. The Public Guard was abolished in 1869.

The Lexington Arsenal was established in Lexington, Virginia, in 1817, to disburse the arms kept at the Virginia Manufactory of Arms in Richmond. The arsenal served to furnish the state's militia with standard muskets, pistols, swords, and bayonets. The Public Guard was responsible for the safekeeping of the arsenal until the formation of the Virginia Military Institute in 1839 when that duty was delegated to the Institute's cadets. Captain James Paxton served as Commandant of the Public Guard at the Lexington Arsenal from 1817 until his resignation in 1826. Paxton was succeeded by David E. Moore.

Scope and Content Information

These records document the activities of the Commandant of the Public Guard at the Lexington Arsenal. Included are monthly returns of soldiers and arms to the governor. The half-monthly returns of soldiers enumerate the soldiers by rank, indicate alterations since the last return (i.e. enlistments, deceased, desertions), and provide the names of new recruits. Returns of arms simply provide the number of muskets

and other armaments. Also included is correspondence from the commandant to the adjutant general and governor concerning supplies, the conduct of soldiers, discharges, and other related issues. One muster roll dated 31 October 1823, provides the names of the guard and their dates of enlistment. Lastly, there can be found documentation on the resignation of Captain James Paxton on 16 December 1826 and the subsequent appointment of David E. Moore as Commandant. Included are letters of recommendation for David E. Moore in 1826.

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.

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Box 2

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