

## **Plaque #1: History of Cantonment Burgwin, 1852-1860**

*Taos Rebellion:* By the mid-nineteenth century, hostility and resistance to the United States occupation of New Mexico had emerged among Native American populations in the northern part of the territory. This was largely due to the US-Mexican War in which the United States acquired vast amounts of new territory. During the US-Mexican war, the Native Americans were extremely unhappy and on 19 January 1847 in Taos, Mexican and Pueblo insurrectionists broke into the house of Governor Charles Bent, shot him with arrows and scalped him. Bent survived and to escape, his wife and children dug through the adobe walls into the neighboring house. The insurrectionists found them, killed Bent but left his wife and children alone. Many other government officials were killed as well. The United States Army acted quickly and 300 troops were sent to quell the revolt. First Dragoon Captain John H. K. Burgwin, for whom the cantonment was named, died in the revolt.

*Construction of Cantonment Burgwin:* Cantonment Burgwin was established by the U.S. Army on August 16, 1852. Colonel Edwin V. Sumner chose this location in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains near the Rio Grande Gorge because it was pivotal for protecting settlers in Taos from attacks by the Jicarilla Apaches, Utes, and Comanche. The cantonment was intended to be a temporary establishment, so the buildings were hastily constructed in two months using vertical ponderosa pine logs placed next to each other, with the spaces between the logs filled with adobe. The cantonment consisted of several buildings including the main fort, which was built around two courtyards. The offices, mess hall, kitchen, and enlisted men's quarters were positioned around one courtyard, with the stables around the other. Other buildings located outside the enclosed main fort included the hospital, the officer's quarters, a guard house and the

laundresses' quarters. The poor craftsmanship and materials of the buildings, however, led to their decay, and by the mid-1850s, Cantonment Burgwin was in disrepair.

*Daily Life and Duties at the Cantonment:*

“The wind whistles loudly by us. Snow beats against the windows...the mountain which overhangs us and towers almost to the skies is clothed in its garb of white snow and dark evergreen foliage. The drooping branches of these trees cast a somber hue upon the rocky clefts upon which the trees are rooted. The long dismal howl of wolves is heard.”

-Private James A. Bennett

Daily life would not have been easy for the soldiers stationed at the cantonment. They lived in the isolated mountains of northern New Mexico miles away from civilization. The summers were hot and the winters were cold and harsh. They lived in badly constructed buildings which were cold and drafty in the winter. It is hard for us to imagine how they endured such conditions.

Soldiers stationed at Fort Burgwin were mainly Dragoons, or horse mounted infantry. These Dragoons protected the settlers in Taos and guarded the main road that went from Taos to Santa Fe. In addition, the Dragoons also accompanied shipments from Fort Union to other posts in northern New Mexico along the Rio Grande.

Initially, one company of Dragoons, consisting of about seventy-five men, was stationed at Cantonment Burgwin. This number, however, fluctuated over time and as many as 238 people

occupied the cantonment. The increase in men can be attributed to the shift of troops south after the abandonment of Fort Massachusetts in southern Colorado.

*Evacuation of Cantonment Burgwin:* On May 18, 1860, Cantonment Burgwin was evacuated due to the decaying buildings and the consolidation of troops further north. Some of the materials from the fort, such as windows and doors, were in good enough condition to be reused and they were sent to Fort Garland in Colorado. The remaining building materials were either recovered by the local community or were burned. For the next 100 years, the remains of Cantonment Burgwin were covered with vegetation and forgotten about.

Sources:

Murphy, L. R.

1973 Cantonment Burgwin, New Mexico, 1852-1860. *Arizona and the West* 15(1):5-26.

Thomas, J. and A. Marjenin

2010 Signature of Women among Men: Material Culture from the Laundress Quarters at Cantonment Burgwin, New Mexico. Paper presented at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Conference of the Society for Historical and Underwater Archaeology, 6-10 January 2010.

Wendorf, F.

2007 *The Fort Burgwin Research Center*. Southern Methodist University Press, Dallas.

## **Plaque #2: Laundresses' Quarters**

*U.S. Army Laundresses of the Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century:* In the spot in which you are now standing, women would have spent hours a day washing the soldier's clothes in water collected from the nearby river, hanging them to dry, and tediously ironing them. Their fingers would become numb and blistered from all the hard work but they endured because it was an honor to serve for their country.

Typically at nineteenth century military cantonments, the company's laundresses would wash, hang to dry, and iron the soldiers' clothing. These laundresses' quarters were usually located away from the main cantonment and were often referred to as 'Soap Suds Row.' The tradition of company laundresses originally came from the British military; however, it was not until March 16, 1802 by an Act of Congress, that laundresses were officially recognized by the U.S. Army. Initially, the Act stipulated that one company could have four laundresses but over the years, that number changed to one for every nineteen and a half men. A majority of the laundresses were the wives of the enlisted soldiers and they earned wages and rations for their work. Many women were attracted to be Army laundresses because they could earn money and still be with their husbands. In addition to washing clothing, the laundresses would also serve as midwives and part time maids or cooks for the officers. On June 19, 1876, General Order 37 abolished company laundresses for the Army. Despite the issuance of this order, women continued to accompany the troops; however, eventually the use of laundresses slowly disappeared.

The Laundresses' Quarters at Cantonment Burgwin were located east of the main fort building and consisted of four rooms. This is consistent with the 1802 law that stipulated four

laundresses per company. The configuration and placement of the Laundresses' Quarters remained the same throughout the occupation of the Cantonment.

*Archaeological Excavations:* In 1965, the Laundresses' Quarters were excavated by Ron Wetherington of Southern Methodist University but were never reconstructed. During the 1965 excavations, two fireplaces and the log footprint of the structure were exposed. After these excavations, the Laundresses' Quarters were neglected and became overgrown with brush and weeds. It was not until 2009 that the Laundresses' Quarters received more attention.

In 2009, the Taos Collaborative Archaeological Program (TCAP) was created as a collaboration of Southern Methodist University (SMU), Dallas, Texas, and Mercyhurst Archaeological Institute (MAI), Erie, Pennsylvania. MAI decided to re-investigate the Laundresses' Quarters because this was one of the only buildings at the fort not reconstructed after the 1960s excavations.

A variety of artifacts were discovered during the 1965, 2009, and 2010 excavations. These artifacts include nails, utensils, clothing fasteners, window glass, and bottle glass. Many military related items were also recovered. Military buttons, cap insignia, and a horse breastplate are most notable.

Sources:

Stewart, M. J.

1980 Army Laundresses: Ladies of the "Soap Suds Row." *Nebraska History* 61 (Winter):421-436.

Thomas, J. and A. Marjenin

2010 Signature of Women among Men: Material Culture from the Laundress Quarters at Cantonment Burgwin, New Mexico. Paper presented at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Conference of the Society for Historical and Underwater Archaeology, 6-10 January 2010.

### **Plaque #3: Archaeology at Fort Burgwin**

In 1956, Ralph Rounds, who owned the land on which Cantonment Burgwin was located, believed that Cantonment Burgwin was in fact on his property and contacted archaeologist Fred Wendorf. Wendorf originally wanted to conduct field work at the prehistoric site Pot Creek Pueblo, which was also located on Rounds' property. In their bargain, Rounds gave Wendorf permission to investigate Pot Creek Pueblo as long as he could find the exact location of Cantonment Burgwin. Wendorf was successful in locating the site, and excavations of Cantonment Burgwin (TA-8) began in 1957. Over the years, many of the buildings, including the main fort, officers' quarters, commander's quarters, and hospital, were excavated and reconstructed using the original vertical log construction method.

In 2009, the Taos Collaborative Archaeological Program (TCAP) was created as a collaboration of Southern Methodist University (SMU), Dallas, Texas, and Mercyhurst Archaeological Institute (MAI), Erie, Pennsylvania. The 2009 MAI field school was conducted at SMU-in-Taos and excavated the Laundresses' Quarters of Cantonment Burgwin. The focus of the excavations was the suspected northeast quadrant of the structure. Excavations at the Laundresses' Quarters continued in the summer 2010 MAI field school, which focused on the southwest corner of the structure, including exposure of the southern fireplace, exploration of the *in situ* floor, and soil sampling from the area north and east of the Laundresses' Quarters.

A wide variety of artifacts were recovered from these excavations, including architectural materials (e.g. nails and window glass), kitchen-related items (e.g., glazed and unglazed ceramics, eating utensils, faunal bone, bottle glass), and military artifacts (e.g. buttons, percussion caps, and mini balls).

Archaeology plays a vital role in reconstructing the past. Specifically, archaeology conducted at Cantonment Burgwin has given insight into the daily lives of the soldiers stationed there as well as the lives of the laundresses. The daily hardships of frontier life in general can also be better understood from the archaeological investigations of the cantonment. It is through archaeology that the material culture of our past is recovered and interpreted. It is the archaeologists and historians that make the past come alive through the material culture that is recovered. Archaeology is extremely valuable and without it we would not know anything about Cantonment Burgwin or the people who were stationed there.

Sources:

Thomas, J. and A. Marjenin

2010 Signature of Women among Men: Material Culture from the Laundress Quarters at Cantonment Burgwin, New Mexico. Paper presented at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Conference of the Society for Historical and Underwater Archaeology, 6-10 January 2010.

#### **Plaque #4: The Hospital at Cantonment Burgwin**

*Hospital Overview:* One hundred and sixty years ago, Dr. Anderson spent his days treating cholera, gangrene, and scarlet fever with opium and quinine in the spot in which you are standing. Despite his valiant efforts, not all of his patients survived.

The hospital was an essential component of Cantonment Burgwin. Military personnel, as well as local citizens and visitors were treated at the hospital. Dr. William Wallace Anderson, head surgeon at Cantonment Burgwin, arrived in November 1856, four years after its establishment, and stayed until May 1860. He earned 115.50 dollars per month for managing the hospital. During his time at Cantonment Burgwin, Dr. Anderson kept extremely detailed journals about his experience. Dr. Anderson's journals show a record of who he treated, how much he charged, and whether the patient lived or died.

“June 23...Fight with Indians – one man killed, several wounded and nearly all horses killed. Received letter from brother”

“July 5...Dragoons arrived. River begins to rise again. Rose during night about a foot”

“July 12...Fuss among camp women. Premature labor – one infant born and two or three more coming”

*Diseases and Illnesses Facing Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century Soldiers and Civilians:* The general belief at this time was that disease and illness came from *koino-miasms*, which is the origination of disease from impurities in the air. These so called impurities were thought to result in typhoid, cholera, and gangrene. Other illnesses included dysentery, measles, scurvy, scarlet fever, whooping cough, and chronic diarrhea. Sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea were also common. A variety of cures and treatments were offered to the afflicted, including most frequently perhaps, opium and quinine. Whiskey, wine, and other types of alcohol were also offered to ease the pain of patients. Dr. Anderson kept his hospital well stocked with all of these medicines as seen in an 1858 medical supply list:

“Glycerine, 2 oz.

Finet-ferric Chloride, ¼ lb.  
Spirits of ether nitric, ¼ lb.  
Aromatic Sulphuric Acid, ¼ lb.  
Pith. Of Sasafras, ½ oz.  
Citric Acid, ¼ lb.  
Brandy, best quality, 2 gal.  
Arsenic, 3 lb.  
Sodae. Bicarb, 2 lbs.  
Potass. Nitrat., ½ lb.  
Alcohol, 2 gal.  
Lycopodium, 1 lb.  
Wine, sherry, 1 doz. bottles  
Port, 1 doz. bottles  
Whiskey, Scotch or Irish, 1 gal.”

*Archaeological Excavations:* In the summer of 1979, archaeological investigation revealed that the hospital consisted of four wards – two on either side of a central hallway. A large fireplace with adobe hearth bricks was also discovered during the excavation. A few aqua and amber colored medicinal bottles were found, as well as soda bottle fragments. Soda was an ingredient often used in medical prescriptions. Fragments of beer, wine, and whiskey bottles were the most commonly found artifact in this excavation. After the completion of the excavation, the hospital was reconstructed.

Sources:

Woosley, A.

1980 Fort Burgwin’s Hospital. *El Palacio* 86(1):3-39

## Price

Size: 18 in x 24 in

Company: [www.signsrus.com](http://www.signsrus.com)

Material: Acrylic Plastic Mounted Plaques

Cost per plaque: \$191.00

Total Cost for all 4 plaques: \$764.00