

5-18-1858

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Recommended Citation

H.R. Misc. Doc. No. 133, 35th Congress, 1st Sess. (1858)

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FORT SNELLING AS A MILITARY DEPOT.

REPORT

OF A

BOARD OF OFFICERS OF THE ARMY,

AS TO

The necessity of maintaining Fort Snelling as a Military depot.

MAY 18, 1858.—Ordered to be printed.

Proceedings of a board of officers which convened at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, by virtue of the following order, viz:

SPECIAL ORDERS No. 1.

FORT SNELLING, MINNESOTA,
April 28, 1858.

By direction of the War Department the following named officers will convene and form a board at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, on the 28th day of April, 1858, at 12 o'clock m., or as soon thereafter as practicable, to examine into and report upon the necessity, advantage, or disadvantage, of maintaining Fort Snelling, as a military depot, for the purpose of supplying any military stations that are now or may hereafter be established in the country to the north and west of that post; also, to report as to the necessity of maintaining a garrison at Fort Snelling to repel Indian incursions, viz:

- 1st. Brevet Brigadier General W. S. Harney, colonel 2d dragoons.
- 2d. Lieutenant Colonel J. E. Johnston, 1st cavalry.
- 3d. Major N. C. Macrae, 3d infantry.
- 4th. Brevet Major W. W. Chapman, captain quartermaster dep't.
- 5th. Captain A. A. Humphreys, corps of topographical engineers.
- 5th. Captain A. Pleasonton, 2d dragoons.

Brevet Major T. W. Sherman, captain 3d artillery, after reporting to Brevet Brigadier General Harney, upon his arrival at St. Louis, Missouri, in accordance with his instructions, will take his place as a member of the board.

By order of General Harney.

A. PLEASONTON,
Capt. 2d Dragoons, A. A. Adj. General.

FORT SNELLING, MINNESOTA,
April 28, 1858.

The board met pursuant to the above order. The following named officers being present, viz :

- 1st. General Harney.
- 2d. Lieutenant Colonel Johnston.
- 3d. Major N. C. Macrae.
- 4th. Major W. W. Chapman.
- 5th. Captain A. A. Humphreys.
- 6th. Captain A. Pleasonton.

The board were occupied during the 28th, 29th, and 30th, days of April in collecting information as regards "the necessity, advantage, or disadvantage, of maintaining Fort Snelling, as a military depot, for the purpose of supplying any military stations that are now or may hereafter be established in the country to the north and west of that post;" and, "also, the necessity of maintaining a garrison at Fort Snelling to repel Indian incursions," after which the board adjourned to meet at St. Louis, Missouri.

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI,
May 4, 1858.

The board met pursuant to adjournment. The following named officers being present, viz :

- 1st. General Harney.
- 2d. Lieutenant Colonel Johnston.
- 3d. Major Macrae.
- 4th. Major Chapman.
- 5th. Major Sherman.
- 6th. Captain Humphreys.
- 7th. Captain Pleasonton.

The board, after a careful examination of all the information obtained at Fort Snelling, report the following facts bearing upon the subject to be investigated.

The condition of the frontier to the north and west of Fort Snelling was ascertained to be as follows :

A line from the post of Fort Ripley to the post of Fort Ridgely marks the frontier to the north and west of Fort Snelling.

Fort Ripley, on the Mississippi river, one hundred and twenty-five miles by the road, above Fort Snelling, and Fort Ridgely, on the Minnesota river, about one hundred miles by the road, above Fort Snelling, are the only military stations now within the country above designated. These posts are the limits of settlement to the north and west of Fort Snelling. The only Indian tribes from which this frontier has to be protected are the Chippewas, who occupy the country to the north of Fort Ripley, and the Mississippi Sioux, whose country is west of Fort Ridgely.

The Winnebagoes, established on a reservation to the southeast of Fort Ridgely, are completely controlled by the settlements which surround them.

These two posts, Ripley and Ridgely, are adequate, in the opinion of the board, to satisfy all the requirements to be made at this time for the safety of this frontier; and it is not probable that any large increase in the number of posts or troops will become necessary at any future period.

Fort Snelling, at the junction of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, surrounded by the towns of St. Paul, St. Anthony, Minneapolis, and Mendota, being only six miles above St. Paul and about seven miles below St. Anthony, with over one hundred miles to the frontier, its garrison cannot promptly and efficiently contribute to repel Indian incursions, while its presence on the frontier would tend to prevent them.

The town of St. Paul is the head of ordinary navigation upon the Mississippi river, and supplies cannot at all times reach Fort Snelling without transshipment. Above the falls of St. Anthony, small steamers ply as far as the Sauk rapids, within forty miles of Fort Ripley. The Minnesota river is navigable for boats of light draught, in favorable stages of water, to Fort Ridgely.

There is a good prairie road on the east side of the Mississippi river, from St. Paul, Fort Snelling, and St. Anthony to Fort Ripley, and also one from the same localities and Minneapolis to Fort Ridgely.

The resources of Minnesota are sufficient to meet all the demands which the government will ever be called upon to make in that quarter for the transportation of troops and supplies, and at a very reasonable cost.

The board is satisfied that the town of St. Paul, being the head of ordinary navigation on the Mississippi, would be the most suitable point of deposit and transshipment for the posts on the frontier to the north and west. By establishing a depot of supplies at Fort Snelling the expense of an additional shipment would often be incurred, to say nothing of other material disadvantages arising from its locality, that will involve a loss of time and additional expense. The cost of maintaining a depot at Fort Snelling will be at least five times as great as the expense of forwarding supplies through St. Paul to the frontier. The duties of the subsistence and quartermaster departments, in the receiving, purchasing, and forwarding of supplies, being mostly of a commercial character, the experience of service has proved it more expedient to use the business facilities of commercial places for these purposes than to establish depots at military stations in their vicinity.

The board respectfully suggest the entire abandonment of Fort Snelling, both as a military station and depot, and the establishment of an agency at St. Paul to forward the necessary supplies to the posts on the frontier by means of private transportation. This method of supply by private transportation, which was used here for several years, proved to be the most economical to the government, and is the mode by which the quartermaster's department supply, generally, the numerous posts established on the whole of our extensive frontier.

The board is unanimous in the opinion expressed in these proceedings.

There being no further business before it, the board adjourned *sine die*.

WM. S. HARNEY,
Col. 2d Dragoons, Brevet. Brig. General,
President of the Board.

A. PLEASANTON, *Capt. 2d Dragoons,*
Recorder of the Board.