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**Letters Sent by the Office  
of the  
Quartermaster General,  
Main Series, 1818-1870**



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Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General  
Record Group 92  
in the National Archives

LETTERS SENT BY THE OFFICE  
OF THE QUARTERMASTER GENERAL,  
MAIN SERIES, 1818-1870

On the 61 rolls of this microfilm publication are reproduced 107 bound volumes of record copies of letters and telegrams sent by the Office of the Quartermaster General, 1818-70. The volumes also contain copies of endorsements sent (replies to incoming communications or forwarding comments). The records are part of Record Group 92, Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General.

The first Quartermaster General, appointed by the Second Continental Congress on June 16, 1775, provided for camp equipment and for the means of transportation for the Army. A Commissary General of Stores and Purchases provided for the subsistence of the Army, and a Clothier General provided for clothing until 1781, when the Treasury Department began procuring these items under a contract system. By a resolution of Congress of July 25, 1785,\* the Office of the Quartermaster General was abolished, and the military supply function was placed under civilian control in the Office of the Secretary of War.

On March 28, 1812, shortly before the War of 1812, an Office of the Quartermaster General in the Quartermaster's Department and an Office of the Commissary General of Purchases were both established by an act of Congress (2 Stat. 696). After the war the incumbent Quartermaster General was retained provisionally by presidential authority until an act of Congress on April 24, 1816 (3 Stat. 297), provided for a Quartermaster General, with one Deputy Quartermaster General to a division.

Until 1818 the quartermaster generals were regarded as field staff officers, appointed in time of war and serving with the principal armies. In 1818 an act of Congress (3 Stat. 426) reorganized the Quartermaster Department under one Quartermaster General and also provided for a Subsistence Department under a Commissary General of Subsistence. The Commissary General of Subsistence was responsible for provisioning the Army, thereby ending the previous contract system in existence since 1781. The Office of the Commissary General of Purchases, which was established in 1812, was retained in Philadelphia.

The distinction between the functions of the Office of the Commissary General (renamed the Purchasing Department in 1816) and those of the Quartermaster Department was not precise, as the act of Congress in 1818 made no clarification beyond the

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\*Journals of the Continental Congress, Vol. 29, p. 574.

description in the 1812 legislation relating to the duties of these two supply agencies. The act of March 28, 1812, provided that the Commissary General of Purchases was to procure and provide all arms, military stores, clothing, and generally all articles of supply needed for the military service of the United States. The Quartermaster General was to purchase military stores, camp equipage, and other articles needed for the troops, and generally to procure and provide means of transportation for the Army, its stores, artillery, and camp equipage.

In 1815 the Commissary General of Purchases in Philadelphia lost its function of procuring firearms and ordnance supplies to the Ordnance Department; in 1818 its function of procuring provisions was transferred to the newly created Subsistence Department; in 1826 its function of supervising the distribution of clothing and equipage was transferred to the Quartermaster General; and in 1832 its function of handling correspondence relating to Army clothing and to appropriations and requisitions was transferred to the Clothing Bureau established in Washington under the War Office. In 1841 the Clothing Bureau was abolished, and its functions were transferred to the Quartermaster Department.

In 1842 (5 Stat. 513), when the Office of the Commissary General of Purchases was abolished and its remaining duties were transferred to the Quartermaster's Department, the Philadelphia Establishment retained the sole function of providing clothing and equipage. At that time it became a field installation of the Quartermaster Department and was known as the Purchasing Officer. In 1847 the title was changed to the Office of Army Clothing and Equipage, and in 1857, to the Philadelphia Quartermaster Depot.

Although the functions of the Quartermaster Department had been ill-defined at the time of its origin, in 1842 they could be clearly defined to consist of the following duties: providing barracks, quarters, hospitals, storehouses, offices, and stables (including the inspection, construction, repair, and provision of furniture and fuel for them); providing transportation of Army troops and stores, storage and transportation of all Army supplies, Army clothing, and camp and garrison equipage; providing cavalry and artillery horses, and supplying forage and straw for them. In addition, the Quartermaster's Department was authorized to pay many incidental expenses of the Army relating to such matters as the per diem paid to extra-duty men; the postage on public service; the expenses of courts-martial, of the pursuit and apprehension of deserters, and of the burials of officers and soldiers; the hire of escorts, expresses, interpreters, spies, and guides; the hire of veterinary surgeons and the purchase of medicines for horses; procurement of needed water at a distance from the posts; and generally the proper and authorized expenses for the movement and operation of any Army troops not expressly assigned to any other department.

The letters sent in this main series are copies of all letters sent by the Quartermaster General himself or by a deputy in his absence, but they do not constitute all the letters sent over his signature. Except for letters relating to clothing estimates and returns for a brief period from 1823 to 1827, all letters sent relating to clothing estimates, returns, prices, shipments, contracts, specifications, and clothing inventories are in another series of letters sent.

All other letters sent by the Quartermaster General until May 1833 are in this main series. In May 1833 a separate series of letters sent to the Secretary of War was begun, and those letters no longer are in this series. In December 1848 the letters sent to heads of such executive departments as the Interior, State, and Navy were included in the new series created for letters sent to the Secretary of War.

As the quantity of claims to be processed by the Quartermaster Department increased after the Mexican War, a separate series of letters sent by the Quartermaster General relating to claims (for chartering vessels and for payments for services and supplies) was begun in December 1848. In January 1862 the letters transmitting vouchers, money and property accounts, contingent accounts, and claims to the Second and Third Auditors of the Treasury Department were removed from this series.

Until 1863 there had been no decentralization within the Office of the Quartermaster General; consequently, most letters emanated from the Quartermaster General. With the vast increase in work connected with the Civil War it became necessary to divide the functions of the Office into organizational units. Although this decentralization was not officially provided for until July 18, 1864, by War Department General Order No. 231, the Quartermaster General began to decentralize his office in 1863. In 1864 the work was formally divided into nine divisions, and although reduced in number, reorganized, and redesignated as branches in 1867, decentralization was the practice thereafter. The initial distribution of duties in 1864 into the nine divisions was as follows: procurement and disposition of horses and mules; procurement and disposition of cloth, clothing, and camp and garrison equipage; procurement and maintenance of ocean and lake transportation; procurement and maintenance of land and western river transportation; procurement of forage and straw; procurement and maintenance of barracks and quarters; procurement and disposition of all regular supplies and payment of expenses not assigned to other divisions; inspection; and records.

The nine divisions and the later branches were under the supervision of a quartermaster officer, and each unit maintained its own series of records. Therefore the routine letters sent relating to these functions were no longer maintained in the main series of letters sent by the Quartermaster General. The

series did, however, continue to contain all the other letters sent by the Quartermaster General relating to these functions, except letters that were sent to the Secretary of War and to heads of other executive departments and that were placed in a separate series.

The intended arrangement of the letters and the endorsements within each volume was chronological, but the clerks were not always able to copy them precisely in that order. The first few pages of several volumes contain letters that should have been entered in preceding volumes, and the last few pages of several volumes contain letters that should have been entered under earlier dates in the volumes.

In the margin beside each letter sent are two sets of numbers, one above and the other below a short line. The number above should indicate the page number of the preceding letter sent entered in the volume to the same addressee, and the one below should indicate the page number in the same volume of the next letter sent to the same addressee. At the beginning of a volume, when the first letter sent to an addressee was copied, one would not expect to find an upper number; in such cases, the number should have been placed below the line. At the end of many letters sent is another notation, for example, BK 73 D614, which refers to the register in which the incoming letter was entered at the time it was received.

Beginning in January 1862 the Office of the Quartermaster General maintained a series of press-copy books from which these fair copies were made. Therefore most letters in this series after that date bear the notation "PB" (press book) in the upper left corner of the letter, followed by the press book volume number and page number.

Some of the letters transcribed in the volumes reproduced in this microcopy were selected for possible publication in The War of the Rebellion, A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1880-1901). The letters selected bear the distinguishing stamp "Copied, War Records, 1861-1865."

Each volume has a name index. After each name index in volumes 4-57 (April 10, 1822-December 31, 1861), there is a list of offices to which letters were sent frequently. The list contains the name of the addressee, the date of the letter, the page number in the volume, and a summary of the contents of the letter. The names of the addressees on the lists were not included in the name indexes. In 1822 only letters to the Second and Third Auditors and to the Secretary of War were listed. Later the letters sent to the Deputy Quartermaster, some of the Assistant Quartermasters, and the several War Department Bureaus were also listed. Beginning with volume 58 (January 2, 1862)

the list was discontinued, and the office, under the name of the incumbent, was included in the regular name index.

The index in each volume has been filmed before the letters in the volume. When there is also a list of letters sent in a volume, the list has been filmed after the index and before the letters. Blank numbered pages have not been filmed.

Also in Record Group 92 are many related records, including the letters received by the Quartermaster General and the letters sent and received by the several units of his office. Closely related records are similar series of letters sent and received in Record Group 94, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, and in Record Group 107, Records of the Office of the Secretary of War.

The introductory remarks for this microfilm publication were prepared by Cleveland E. Collier and Maizie H. Johnson.



CONTENTS

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Volume</u>	<u>Inclusive Dates</u>
1	1	June 5, 1818-Dec. 31, 1819
	2	Jan. 4, 1820-Mar. 16, 1821
2	3	Mar. 16, 1821-Apr. 19, 1822
	4	Apr. 19, 1822-Mar. 12, 1823
3	5	Mar. 12-Dec. 11, 1823
	6	Dec. 12, 1823-Aug. 11, 1824
4	7	Aug. 11, 1824-May 14, 1825
	8	May 14, 1825-Jan. 27, 1826
5	9	Jan. 23-Aug. 25, 1826
	10	Aug. 26, 1826-Mar. 8, 1827
6	11	Mar. 8, 1827-Mar. 27, 1828
	12	Mar. 27, 1828-Apr. 4, 1829
7	13	Apr. 4, 1829-Jan. 25, 1830
	14	Jan. 26-Sept. 30, 1830
8	15	Oct. 1, 1830-July 1, 1831
	16	July 1, 1831-Mar. 31, 1832
9	17	Mar. 31-Oct. 12, 1832
	18	Oct. 12, 1832-May 3, 1833
10	19	May 3, 1833-Jan. 28, 1834
	20	Jan. 29-Oct. 7, 1834
11	21	Oct. 7, 1834-June 22, 1835
	22	June 22, 1835-Feb. 6, 1836
12	23	Feb. 6-Sept. 5, 1836
	24	Sept. 5, 1836-June 14, 1837
13	25	June 14, 1837-Feb. 12, 1838
	26	Feb. 12-Oct. 4, 1838
14	27	Oct. 4, 1838-Apr. 12, 1839
	28	Apr. 12-Nov. 9, 1839
15	29	Nov. 9, 1839-May 15, 1840
	30	May 16-Nov. 3, 1840
16	31	Nov. 3, 1840-June 18, 1841
	32	June 19, 1841-Mar. 11, 1842
17	33	Mar. 11-Oct. 29, 1842
	34	Oct. 29, 1842-July 14, 1843
18	35	July 14, 1843-June 10, 1844
19	36	June 11, 1844-Aug. 7, 1845
20	37	Aug. 8, 1845-Aug. 21, 1846
21	38	Aug. 21, 1846-Apr. 5, 1847
22	39	Apr. 5, 1847-Jan. 1, 1848
23	40	Jan. 3-Aug. 15, 1848
24	41	Aug. 16, 1848-Apr. 26, 1849
25	42	Apr. 27, 1849-July 27, 1850
26	43	July 29, 1850-Aug. 23, 1851
27	44	Aug. 25, 1851-June 30, 1852
28	45	July 2, 1852-June 4, 1853
29	46	June 4, 1853-May 18, 1854
30	47	May 19, 1854-Apr. 11, 1855
31	48	Apr. 11, 1855-Jan 9, 1856

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Volume</u>	<u>Inclusive Dates</u>
32	49	Jan. 10-Sept. 23, 1856
33	50	Sept. 24, 1856-June 12, 1857
	51	June 13, 1857-Apr. 15, 1858
34	52	Apr. 15, 1858-Jan. 20, 1859
	53	Jan. 20, 1859-Jan. 6, 1860
35	54	Jan. 7-Oct. 31, 1860
	55	Nov. 1, 1860-July 8, 1861
36	56	July 9-Oct. 5, 1861
	57	Oct. 7-Dec. 31, 1861
37	58	Jan. 2-Mar. 28, 1862
	59	Mar. 24-May 13, 1862
38	60	May 13-June 26, 1862
	61	June 26-Aug. 14, 1862
39	62	Aug. 14-Sept. 25, 1862
	63	Sept. 24-Nov. 4, 1862
40	64	Nov. 4-Dec. 16, 1862
	65	Dec. 16, 1862-Jan. 21, 1863
41	66	Jan. 21-Feb. 28, 1863
	67	Feb. 26-Apr. 10, 1863
42	68	Apr. 10-May 22, 1863
	69	May 22-June 26, 1863
43	70	June 26-Aug. 7, 1863
	71	Aug. 7-Sept. 19, 1863
44	72	Sept. 19-Nov. 20, 1863
	73	Nov. 20, 1863-Jan. 8, 1864
45	74	Jan. 8-Feb. 26, 1864
	75	Feb. 25-Apr. 9, 1864
46	76	Apr. 9-May 19, 1864
	77	May 19-July 1, 1864
47	78	July 1-Aug. 13, 1864
	79	Aug. 12-Sept. 20, 1864
48	80	Sept. 20-Nov. 2, 1864
	81	Nov. 2-Dec. 13, 1864
49	82	Dec. 20, 1864-Feb. 13, 1865
	83	Feb. 13-Apr. 3, 1865
50	84	Apr. 3-June 2, 1865
	85	June 2-Aug. 5, 1865
51	86	Aug. 5-Sept. 28, 1865
	87	Sept. 28-Nov. 10, 1865
52	88	Nov. 10-Dec. 29, 1865
	89	Dec. 29, 1865-Feb. 14, 1866
53	90	Feb. 14-Apr. 4, 1866
	91	Apr. 4-May 25, 1866
54	92	May 26-July 25, 1866
	93	July 25-Oct. 10, 1866
55	94	Oct. 10, 1866-Jan. 16, 1867
	95	Jan. 16-Apr. 10, 1867
56	96	Apr. 9-July 18, 1867
	97	July 17-Nov. 5, 1867

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Volume</u>	<u>Inclusive Dates</u>
57	98	Nov. 5, 1867-Feb. 22, 1868
	99	Feb. 20-June 29, 1868
58	100	June 30-Nov. 16, 1868
	101	Nov. 16, 1868-Mar. 30, 1869
59	102	Mar. 30-July 30, 1869
	103	July 30-Nov. 27, 1869
60	104	Nov. 27, 1869-Mar. 28, 1870
	105	Mar. 28-June 30, 1870
61	106	June 30-Oct. 18, 1870
	107	Oct. 18-Dec. 31, 1870