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REPORT OF VISITORS TO UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY.

LETTER FROM THE VISITORS FROM THE HOUSE TO THE MILITARY ACADEMY, SUBMITTING A REPORT ON THEIR VISIT.

JANUARY 4, 1909.—Referred to the Committee on Military Affairs and ordered to be printed.

December, 1908.

SIR:—

The undersigned appointed by you to visit the United States Military Academy at West Point, N. Y., respectfully report that, in accordance with our appointment, we went to West Point June 1, 1908, and we submit the following:

After having purchased tickets May 28, 1908, and when on the way to the train for West Point the following telegram was received:

> Military Academy Appropriation Act approved to-day repeals provisions of law under which you were appointed a member of Board of Visitors to the United States Military Academy to convene next month. There is now no law authorizing board so constituted to act or convene, or providing expenses of its members, and your appointment as member of said board is necessarily cancelled.
>
> ROBERT SHAW OLIVER,
> Assistant Secretary of War.

Having already arranged to go to West Point, however, and having received from the superintendent of the academy an earnest invitation to go notwithstanding the above telegram, and receiving no cancellation of our appointment from you, we went to West Point to perform such duty as

might seem possible and proper under the circumstances, defraying our own expenses in toto.

We met at West Point Gen. S. M. B. Young, Col. H. L. Higginson, and Mr. George S. Patton, designated by the President to the duty also assigned to us by you. June 1, 1908, at 10:00 A. M., we met with these gentlemen at the superintendent's office for the duties of our appointment, and after reading said telegram and considering the said appropriation act, we decided that we could not meet as a board of visitors, as has been done by previous visitors to the academy, but that, in obedience to the request of the superintendent, we should visit and inspect the various departments of the reservation at West Point, the academy equipments of the school and all matters and things concerning the same, and this we did.

TARGET PRACTICE.

We witnessed target practice on the field and on the river and were satisfied with the modern improvements in sighting and firing the guns, and must mention the accuracy of the firing in both. With the limited range by which the cadets are handicapped we were pleased with the exhibition of skill at these practices.

The school needs a target range beyond the 400 yards it now has, and the same should be provided.

STABLES—HORSES.

The stables are of modern construction and equipment, and convenience and economy are noticeable in the conduct of the same.

The horses are well cared for and serve the purposes of their use satisfactorily.

PACK MULES.

The time limit of packing the military equipment on the backs of mules for a journey showed that details of the army are carefully studied and properly taught.

THE KITCHEN AND DINING-ROOM.

We found the kitchen a model of neatness and cleanli-

ness, and the method of measuring out each portion of provisions for a meal, and the preparation thereof for the table quite complete. The service in the dining-room is the best, and the orderly habits of the young men at the tables are worthy of praise.

CLUB-ROOMS, QUARTERS, ETC.

The club-rooms, quarters, chapel, and other things are all so well ordered that the health, morals, discipline and esprit de corps of the cadets would please anybody interested in the future commanders of our land forces.

THE LIBRARY.

The library is a good working library. It is useful to officers as well as the cadets. It receives many donations from time to time, generally high-class books, and even works of art.

Naturally, those who graduate at the academy, as they find the same in the years after graduation, send to the library many valuable books, charts, and curios which in themselves, constitute a valuable collection. The liberal appropriations by Congress to keep the library abreast of the times should be continued without stint, for these appropriations are not in vain.

REBUILDING—ENLARGEMENT.

The rebuilding and new building authorized by recent acts of Congress are going on satisfactorily, and when the plans now formed are fully carried out, promises to afford and constitute the military school the best housed and best conditioned educational military institute in the world, besides "a stately and appropriate architectural setting" in the rugged strategic "point" of the Hudson.

The enlargement of the improved grounds of the reservation in a scheme of general utilization is among the best of the things going on there, and leads laymen to the conviction that past appropriations have had a splendid purpose and are not being wasted on fanciful designs and chimerical notions.

THE CADETS.

The cadets who are to be the commanders of the armies of the Union interested us most of all. Here we found over four hundred of the flower of our young manhood seriously studying the arts of war that peace may be maintained.

Their marching, their perfect alignment, their familiarity with guns and swords, their discipline, their morals, their intelligent solidarity in parade, their lofty bearing, their courtesy, their splendid soldierly conduct impress one with the conviction that West Point is a great school.

The school maintains a high standard of education and scholarship. It proceeds upon the principle that, all things else being equal, the intelligent soldier is the best soldier. They become first-class engineers, first-class artillerymen, first-class cavalrymen, first-class infantrymen, first-class commanders of every arm of the service.

The band is good and the service is generally good at West Point. The corps of officers, from the superintendent throughout the entire personnel of the teaching faculty of the institution, are men especially suited to the work each one does, so that we can properly say that our Military Academy is a well equiped, well disciplined, well ordered, well conducted and well applied military school.

FORT PUTNAM.

The restoration of historic Fort Putnam, having much of sentiment in it, is yet a crowning feature of the strength and security surrounding and surmounting the fortunate location of the academy. Being on the summit of the "point" the restoration of this fort has seemed expensive, yet the details of this cost fully justify the expenditures thus far, and the progress made toward complete restoration of the place warrant the necessary additional appropriation to complete the same.

A HOTEL.

A good hotel is demanded at West Point. We submit, however, that the hotel should not be in the school grounds at all.

The point where the present hotel is situated should be free of all buildings for strategic reasons, as well as from scenic beauty.

A promiscuous hostelry should not be at the school house door. No other school allows a hotel, catering to the general public, within its grounds. The excellent discipline maintained here may better serve to offset the ill effects of a promiscuous public coming and going hourly, than would the simple orders of a common-school teacher preserve the proper decorum in the ordinary village or town; but however controlling military discipline may be, and how muchsoever the cadets may be occupied in their military studies and maneuvers, the promiscuous and everyday intercourse with the general public is not desirable nor useful.

The hotel should not be within the school grounds, but outside thereof and adjacent thereto. The proposed relocation of the hotel is not desirable, because it is practically within the school grounds.

THE LADYCLIFFE PROPERTY.

There is, near Highland Falls village, just outside the West Point Reservation, a building known as the Ladycliffe School, formerly the "Cozzens Hotel," which, from inspection, would make a good hotel property for West Point, and is most delightfully located on the very brink of the Hudson.

This building stands in the midst of a 48-acre tract of land adjoining the reservation, which itself, should belong to the West Point Reservation, since the entire tract has such a surface as to appropriately supplement the small amount of buildable grounds on the reservation. In the judgment of your appointees, the superintendent of the academy should be authorized to open negotiations for this Ladycliffe property for the purpose above indicated, and to report to the Secretary of War the best price at which the same may be secured at an early date.

CONSTITUTION ISLAND.

Constitution Island lies across the main channel of the

Hudson River from West Point. It was strongly fortified by the soldiers of the Revolution. The outlines of the several forts of 1776, and portions of the fortifications then erected remain. The historic chain which kept the "British boats at bay" in the days of Washington, extended from a staple in the everlasting rocks of "Constitution Island" to the adamantine base of West Point. The Superintendent of the Military Academy writes of this island as follows:

HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY,
WEST POINT, N. Y., May 27, 1907.

SIR:

I have the honor to invite the attention of the Board of Visitors to the question of the advisability of the purchase of Constitution Island. In my opinion, the Government should acquire this piece of property without delay.

The island comprises about 230 acres of high land and some 50 acres of low-lying meadow land, situated directly across the river from West Point and distant about 300 yards. It has excellent rail and water communications, is easily accessible from the government reservation of West Point, and bears upon its surface the remains of some 10 breastworks commenced in 1775 and later completed by Kosciusko.

In forming an estimate as to the value to the Government of Constitution Island, it may be well to consider the facts under three heads:

1. *The Direct Advantage to the Government Resulting from its Ownership.*—It does not appear that the island is required as an engineer, ordnance, or torpedo depot, although its position with a view to its possible use for one of such purposes should not be entirely disregarded. On account of the ease with which it may be reached by either land or water, and its impregnable position as regards attack, it might readily prove of great value.

Its acquisition by the Government has been favored by two Secretaries of War and it has been recommended as a drill ground for ponton building and other practical military engineering work by two former chiefs of engineers, by former superintendents, and by former instructors in the department of practical military engineering. For exercise in range finding and fire drill its ownership by the Government would enhance the value of the present plant for the instruction of cadets in these subjects during the summer time. It is nearer to the camp than any other ground suitable for practicable work in trench digging, demolitions, etc.

2. *The Probable Damage to the Government Should the Island Pass Into Other Hands.*—The location on the island of objectionable manufacturing establishments, such as are found at other less suitable points along the river, would be very unfortunate for West Point. The turning of the island into a picnic ground or other resort, for which its proximity to New York

City renders it well fitted and which is known to have been seriously contemplated by parties who have sought to acquire it, would result in placing at the very doors of the Military Academy a serious menace to its welfare. Any reasonable expenditure of money to insure against such a result is, I believe, not only warranted, but a duty owed to the nation.

3. *The Sentimental Value Attaching to the Property.*—On account of the remains of revolutionary works thereon and the historical associations of the island with some of the most stirring events in the history of the country, it may be well regarded as a duty of the Government to purchase the island and preserve the remains of the fortifications thereon as object lessons and as a memorial to men and deeds which should never be forgotten by our people.

The present owner of the island, one of the Warner sisters, is well known to all of the older graduates of West Point. It has long been her desire that the island, which is her home, should pass into the hands of the Government. Several bills looking to its purchase have been introduced into Congress, but have failed to pass. An investigation made a year ago into the value of the property in this vicinity possessing less or equal advantages for most purposes than does Constitution Island, showed that $1,000 per acre is the minimum price at which sales of such property have been made within the last few years, yet the owner of the island offers it to the Government at a price considerably less than $1,000 per acre.

To my mind there is every reason why the Government should acquire this property as soon as possible at the reasonable figure at which the owner offers it.

Very respectfully,

H. L. SCOTT,
Colonel, U. S. Army,
Superintendent.

Brig. Gen. THOMAS WARD, U. S. Army (Retired),
President Board of Visitors, West Point, N. Y.

We believe that the Government should own Constitution Island, and that it should be improved by the restoration of the revolutionary forts thereon; for the establishment thereon of a preparatory school for boys recommended for appointment to the academy, and for the military education of the volunteers of the militia of the various States of the Union and the national guard. And also for such other uses and purposes as may be deemed valuble as an adjunct of the West Point grounds.

A GIFT OF THE ISLAND.

Miss Anna Bartlett Warner, the owner of Constitution

Island, told us when we visited the island last June, that she desired that the Government should have the island; that she hoped it would never become a Monte Carlo to corrupt and degrade West Point, or fall into impious hands to tarnish the hallowed grounds of the Revolution.

Since our visit to the Military Academy, Miss Warner has sold the island to Mrs. Margaret Olivia Sage, the philanthropic widow of the late Russell Sage, with the expressed intention and purpose that the same shall be donated and conveyed to the United States in furtherance of the uses above set forth, and as an adjunct to the West Point Military Reservation.

We recommend the acceptance of this choice gift, and that a resolution of thanks to Anna Bartlett Warner and Margaret Olivia Sage be passed by Congress for this patriotic donation.

Respectfully submitted,

JOHN C. CHANEY, M. C.
ADIN B. CAPRON, M. C.

Hon. JOSEPH G. CANNON,
Speaker House of Representatives.