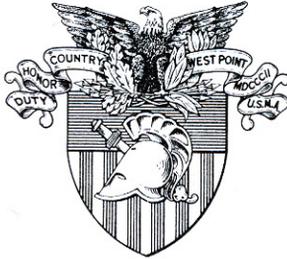


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**THE BEGINNING  
OF THE  
WEST POINT LIBRARY**



*BULLETIN NO. 3*

**THE LIBRARY  
UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY  
WEST POINT, NEW YORK**

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**THE BEGINNING  
OF THE  
WEST POINT LIBRARY**

*by*

**SIDNEY FORMAN, *Librarian***  
**United States Military Academy**

**Foreword by**  
**LIEUTENANT GENERAL GARRISON H. DAVIDSON**  
*Superintendent*  
**United States Military Academy**

**PLAN**  
des Forts, Batteries  
et Poste de West-Point.  
1780.



- |                       |                                  |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| A. Magasin de-bruit.  | I. Colline de Bunker.            |
| B. Vieilles Casernes. | K. Duck-Point.                   |
| C. Magasin militaire. | L. Jardin de Kosciusko.          |
| D. Muraille.          | M. Prisons, Casernes.            |
| E. Embarcadere.       | N. Ecole du Génie.               |
| F. Hôpital.           | O. Ateliers.                     |
| G. Batteries.         | P. Etang.                        |
| H. Horn-Point.        | R. Magasin milit <sup>re</sup> . |
|                       | S. Bibliothèque.                 |
|                       | T. Quartier-Général.             |
|                       | U. Laboratoire.                  |

MAP OF WEST POINT, drawn by a French Officer in 1780, as reproduced from Marquis Francois de Barbé-Marbois, Complet d'Arnold et de Sir Henry Clinton contre les Etats Unis ... (Paris, 1816).

Note the term "bibliothèque" (library) in the legend.

## FOREWORD



The United States Military Academy Library, with approximately 160,000 volumes and a rich collection of manuscripts, is a national cultural heritage.

It was the first Army library as well as the first Federal library in the United States; its book collection was started by the Corps of Invalids in 1777. In the 19th century it became the largest American military and engineering library.

The early growth of the Library was marked by the importation of many French publications in the field of the mathematical and physical sciences. To procure these books, Colonel William McRee and Major Sylvanus Thayer were sent abroad (1815-1817) by President James Monroe. Their book purchases, of approximately 1,000 volumes, introduced into the United States the best known works of European, particularly French, military art as well as of the sciences. It was upon Thayer's return to the United States that he was appointed Superintendent of the Military Academy.

The Library continued to grow, stimulated by the interest of successive Superintendents and Librarians, so that today it serves the requirements of the academic staff and the Corps of Cadets with a collection of current book materials. In the course of its growth, it also has assembled a collection of manuscript and published materials covering the history of the Hudson Highlands, and a military book and manuscript collection, unique in content.

West Point takes pride in its historic library which serves not only the requirements of scholars interested in the past but also its own present academic needs.

GARRISON H. DAVIDSON  
Lieutenant General, USA  
Superintendent

## THE BEGINNING OF THE WEST POINT LIBRARY



The United States Military Academy Library is the first Army library, and, in its antecedents, is the first Federal library. In fact, it is older than the Military Academy itself, which dates its founding from the Act of Congress of 16 March 1802.<sup>1</sup>

Provision for this early book collection first appeared in the 1777 effort of Congress to establish a military education program for officers in the expedient form of a Corps of Invalids; the Corps was patterned on a similar organizational vehicle set up by Louis XIV in 1670 which, in France, was designed to provide food, clothing, and lodging for wounded and disabled soldiers. The Congressional resolution setting up the military library in conjunction with a regimental type of school appears in the Journals of the Continental Congress, 20 June 1777:

"Resolved, That a corps of invalids be formed, consisting of eight companies... . This corps to be employed in garrisons, and for guards in cities and other places, where magazines, or arsenals, or hospitals are placed; and also to serve as a military school for young gentlemen, previous to their being appointed to marching regiments; for which purpose, all the subaltern officers, when off duty, shall be obliged to attend a mathematical school, appointed for the purpose, to learn geometry, arithmetic, vulgar and decimal fractions, and the extraction of roots; and

<sup>1</sup> The first official proposal for the establishment of the Library of Congress was dated 23 June 1790; the Library was established in 1800. See David C. Mearns, "The Story Up to Now," in Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress, June 30, 1946 (Washington, 1947), p. 14 ff.

that the officers of this corps shall be obliged to contribute one day's pay in every month... for the purpose of purchasing a regimental library of the most approved authors on tactics and the petite guerre... ."2

The commanding officer of the Corps of Invalids responsible for assembling this library was Lewis Nicola,<sup>3</sup> a Philadelphian of French origin who had established his military reputation by service in the militia and by the publication of three manuals: A Treatise of Military Exercise (1776), and two translations from the French, L'ingenieur de Campagne: or Field Engineer (1776), and A Treatise on the Military Service, of Light Horse, and Light Infantry (1777). Nicola was thoroughly familiar with the role of books, having maintained a circulating library in Philadelphia before the Revolution.

Part of the Invalids unit was at West Point by November 1780, and by August 1782 the entire Corps was concentrated on the Hudson in the West Point area. This Corps, the "military academy of the Army" during the Revolution, appears to have organized at West Point an arsenal, an engineering school, and a library. Evidence that a building was intended as a military library appears on a map of West Point drawn by a French officer in 1780, and published in the Marquis de Barbé-Marbois' Complot d'Arnold.<sup>4</sup> The sketch map shows that a building for the library was projected among the structures at West Point. The building (Bibliothèque) was indicated in outline.

<sup>2</sup> Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789 (Washington, D.C., 1907), VIII, p. 485.

<sup>3</sup> Louise B. Dunbar, "Lewis Nicola," Dictionary of American Biography, Dumas Malone, ed., 22 vols. (New York, 1934), XIII, p. 509.

<sup>4</sup> Marquis Francois de Barbé-Marbois, Complot d'Arnold et de Sir Henry Clinton contre les États Unis... (Paris, 1816).

That books were essential to any program of military education was well known to the responsible political and military leaders of the Revolution. In 1777, for example, Washington, urging the officers of the Continental Army to read, wrote "As War is a Science, and a great deal of useful knowledge and Instruction to be drawn from Books, you are to cause your Officers to devote some part of their time to reading Military Authors... ." <sup>5</sup>

Alexander Hamilton, Henry Knox (once a Boston bookseller), John Adams, and others, in addition to Washington, realized that the military profession was not a vocational skill which could be acquired by practice alone.

At the close of the Revolution, the Corps of Invalids was dissolved but a garrison was retained at West Point. In the years which followed, despite the recommendations of Washington and Hamilton for the organization of a more substantial type of military academy, Congress could be persuaded to do little more than establish another regimental school with its accompanying book collection. <sup>6</sup> This was done by the Act of 9 May 1794 which not only created the Corps of Artillerists and Engineers and for the first time established in the U.S. Army the rank of cadet, but also directed the Secretary of War "to provide, at the public expense, under such regulations as shall be directed by the President of the United States, the necessary books, instruments, and apparatus, for the

<sup>5</sup> The Writings of George Washington, J.C. Fitzpatrick, ed., 33 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1931-44), v. 10, p. 238. At various times Washington encouraged the study of military authors and the publication of their works. This also appears in the writings of Hamilton, Knox, John Adams, and others.

<sup>6</sup> Jesse H. Spera, Foundations of the Public Library (Chicago, Ill., 1949), shows a conspicuous public interest in military and naval treatises between the years 1789 and 1791, reflecting the political stresses of the time. p. 150.

use and benefit of the said Corps."<sup>7</sup> Part of this Corps formed the garrison at West Point and the books were used for teaching purposes. Little is known about the school except that the cadets, along with the junior officers, were expected to attend regular classes in a two-story building called "The Old Provost," probably one of the structures on the Plain built by General Alexander McDougall during the Revolution. It was later reported that some officers became indignant at descending to the grade of pupil and in 1796, by design or accident, the books and instruments were destroyed by fire, along with the building in which they were housed. Joseph G. Swift, the first graduate of the Military Academy, substantiates this report in his Memoirs,<sup>8</sup> where he records a conversation among Alexander Hamilton, Jonathan Williams, and Philip Schuyler in which General Hamilton regretted that the books and instruments that "had been collected during the administration of Washington" were destroyed by the fire in 1796.

The congressional legislation of 1802 to which the Military Academy traces its formal beginning again authorized the formation of a book collection. The fact that the Military Academy was established in 1802 on the site of the older schools, with some continuity of organizational structure, academic staff, and cadets, supports the opinion that at least a few books remained from the earlier West Point schools to form the nucleus of the Library of the United States Military Academy.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The Debates and Proceedings in The Congress of the United States (Washington, D.C., 1849), 3rd Cong., 1793-95, p. 1444.

<sup>8</sup> The Memoirs of General Joseph Gardner Swift (Worcester, Mass., 1890), p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Louis Shores, Origins of the American College Library, 1638-1800 (Nashville, Tenn., 1934), shows that of the nine colonial colleges two had begun their book collections in advance of the respective colleges themselves, p. 226.