

SALE AND REMOVAL OF FORT BLISS, TEX.

FEBRUARY 6, 1890.—Recommended to the Committee on Military Affairs and ordered to be printed.

Mr. LANHAM, from the Committee on Military Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT:

[To accompany bill H. R. 3923.]

The Committee on Military Affairs, having considered House bill No. 3923, entitled "A bill to provide for the sale of the site of Fort Bliss, Tex., the sale or removal of the improvements thereof, and for a new site and the construction of suitable buildings thereon," respectfully report the same to the House with certain amendments hereinafter stated, and recommend that when so amended the bill do pass.

Strike out the words "and shall purchase" in lines 1 and 2 of section 2, and insert in lieu thereof the words "to select and acquire title to." Also strike out the words "three hundred and twenty nor more than six hundred and forty" in lines 2 and 3, section 2, and insert in their stead the words "one thousand." Strike out the words "not to exceed in cost twenty dollars per acre" in line 4, and "twelve company" in lines 7 and 8 of the same section. In line 14, section 2, strike out the word "purchased" and insert the word "acquired." At the end of section 2 add the following words, "And that said title shall be obtained without expense to the Government."

Strike out the word "purchase" in line 2, section 3, and insert the word "acquisition."

These amendments are recommended at the suggestion of the Secretary of War and Maj. Gen. J. M. Schofield, and in view of the fact that the necessary amount of land for the new post, it is learned, can be obtained by donation, and without expense to the Government.

The Secretary of War, to whom the bill was referred for suggestion, says among other things:

With reference to the provision in line 3 of section 2 which limits the amount of ground to be purchased for the new post to not more than 640 acres, I would suggest that the limitation be either stricken out, so as to leave the amount discretionary with the Secretary of War, or that the limit be increased to 1,000 acres. It is generally the case that more land than 640 acres is wanted for a regimental post and rifle-range, and it can usually be obtained to better advantage at first than after the post is established.

General Schofield says:

I am decidedly in favor of the purchase of a new site, properly located, near El Paso, Tex., for a military post, in lieu of the present post of Fort Bliss, and the sale of the present grounds and buildings as soon as the new post is ready for occupation by the present garrison. The size of the new post should not be fixed by law at this time, but left to be determined by the future interests of the military service. Yet the ground to be purchased should be large enough for a full regiment, including the necessary rifle-range, etc., say 1,000 acres, so that the garrison may be enlarged when

necessary. I would simply suggest that your bill be amended by striking out the words "twelve company," so that the size of the new post may be fixed for the present by the amount of the appropriation for its construction. Since the land can be obtained at a nominal cost, as stated by the citizens of El Paso, the amount named in the bill will accomplish what is important at this time.

It is considered material to submit the following facts in connection with this bill:

The present site of Fort Bliss, the military post at El Paso, is undesirable almost to the point of being untenable. For years the post commanders have successively reported it as objectionable and urged that, in view of the necessity of a change of location, no extra expenditure be incurred in fitting up the present site. The result is that Fort Bliss lacks many of the improvements that other military sites have received. The Fort Bliss military reservation consists of 132 acres, of which only about 30 acres is even approximately level and scarcely any of it entirely level. The remaining 100 acres is so broken by hills and ravines as to be entirely unfit for military use. It is impossible to extend the reservation in any direction so as to secure additional level ground. Moreover, small as is the parade ground, it is bisected by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé Railway, to the great inconvenience and even danger of officers and troops. Parallel with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé Railway and a few rods to the east of the parade ground runs the Southern Pacific Railway. The reservation comprises the narrow strip of ground through which a railroad from the north or west must necessarily pass, as these two railroads do. Indeed, Fort Bliss as at present located has been aptly described by an army officer as lying directly "in the highway of the continent." The ground is sorely needed by the railroads, and the occupation of the ground as a military reservation places a barrier in the path of commerce. If the post were moved the ground and buildings could be sold by the Government for a good price. Again, the present site is within the city limits and only a mile from the business center of the city, and hence bad for the *morale* of the troops. For a fuller statement of the objectionable features of the present site, reference may be had to the annual reports of post commanders at Fort Bliss, especially the reports for 1889 and 1888.

It is believed that El Paso is the most important military point on the Mexican frontier and is the most central and commanding point from which to reach all parts of western Texas and of southern New Mexico and Arizona; and therefore that the military post at El Paso should be enlarged and strengthened to such a degree as will make the advantages of this location available in any military emergency that may arise.

El Paso is situated in the extreme western corner of Texas, 4 miles from the southernmost point of New Mexico. El Paso is directly on the boundary line between the United States and Mexico and about midway between the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean; the distance in a direct line from El Paso to the mouth of the Rio Grande being about 700 miles, and from El Paso to the Pacific Ocean about 600 miles. Besides El Paso there are but two other important railroad points on the Mexican frontier, namely, Laredo and Eagle Pass, Laredo being but 200 miles from the mouth of the Rio Grande and Eagle Pass but 300 miles.

El Paso is about 1,200 miles distant from St. Louis, Kansas City, New Orleans, San Francisco, and City of Mexico. El Paso derives its name from the fact that the mountains which traverse New and Old Mexico north and south here close in upon the Rio Grande, leaving but a narrow pass that forms a natural causeway between lofty mountain ranges.

This pass is now traversed by two railroads, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé and the Southern Pacific, which are the great routes to the North and West, respectively. El Paso is often called the "Gateway to Mexico," on account of the commanding position which it occupies in the central part of the northern boundary of Mexico and as the northern terminus of the Mexican Central Railway which traverses the great central plateau of Mexico for a distance of 1,200 miles, and is the principal railroad artery of Mexico.

Immediately across the Rio Grande from El Paso is the important Mexican City of Juarez (formerly called Paso del Norte), a city already of about the size of El Paso and rapidly growing under the fostering care of the Mexican Government. A strong garrison is maintained in Juarez by the Mexican Government, which clearly recognizes the importance of this point and has adopted a policy calculated to build up and strengthen this rival of El Paso. During the year 1859 a custom house costing \$155,000 was completed in Juarez, and the Mexican Government is constructing costly revetments to protect the city from inroads by the Rio Grande. No other point along the whole northern boundary of Mexico is receiving so much attention from the Mexican Government as this.

The great importance of El Paso as a strategical point is readily discerned by examining a map of the southwestern part of the United States and the northern part of Mexico. Besides commanding the narrow pass above mentioned El Paso is, by reason of its central location and its unrivaled railroad facilities, the natural headquarters for the entire military field of western Texas and southern New Mexico and Arizona, as well as the point from which any part of the entire central plateau of Mexico can be most easily and quickly reached, even as far as the City of Mexico, while a projected railroad from Juarez westward across the Sierra Madre will afford direct communication with the vast extent of country lying west of those mountains and extending to the Gulf of California.

Five trunk lines of railroad, each about 1,200 miles long, radiate from El Paso, namely, the Texas and Pacific and Galveston, Harrisburgh and San Antonio eastward, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé northward, the Southern Pacific westward, and the Mexican Central southward. Several other lines are projected, and one of them, the Kansas City, El Paso and Mexican, partially completed. The last mentioned road will connect El Paso with a rich coal and lumber district 150 miles north.

El Paso being the terminal of all these railroads, locomotives and cars would always be in readiness here to transport any number of troops to any locality where an Indian outbreak or other trouble demanded their presence.

Nine years ago, when the first railroad reached this place, El Paso was a village of less than 800 population, as shown by the census of 1880. In the spring of 1859 the population was found by actual count to be 11,120. The growth of El Paso has been steady and substantial both in population and in wealth. The assessed valuation of city property is now over \$6,000,000, and the assessed valuation for El Paso county about \$11,000,000.

As a mining center, El Paso already takes high rank. Two large smelting works have been in operation here for two years. One of them employs 375 men the year around, disburses \$700,000 annually, and produced \$2,500,000 worth of bullion during the year 1889. The extent and importance of the silver ore interest will appear from the

following statistics of the importation of silver ore from Mexico into this customs district :

| Years. | Tons. | Value. | Average tons per day. | Average value per ton. |
|-----------|---------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1884..... | 1, 815 | \$260, 608 | 5 | \$145. 00 |
| 1885..... | 8, 403 | 782, 275 | 23 | 94. 00 |
| 1886..... | 22, 045 | 1, 845, 774 | 60 | 84. 00 |
| 1887..... | 44, 773 | 2, 889, 093 | 123 | 65. 00 |
| 1888..... | 68, 212 | 3, 842, 358 | 187 | 56. 50 |
| 1889..... | 60, 256 | 3, 518, 894 | 167 | 74. 00 |

The decrease for 1889 over 1888 was due to Secretary Windom's instructions to collectors of customs in relation to the importation of silver ore. The importation fell off from 4,694 tons in September to 453 tons in October, but recovered to a great extent before the end of the year, as the instructions came to be better understood.

This is the largest customs district in the United States. It extends from Presidio del Norte, Tex., to Yuma, on the line between Arizona and California, a distance of 960 miles. The working force of the district has been largely increased during the last three years. The following table shows the increase in customs duties collected in this district:

| | |
|---|---------------|
| For fiscal year ending June 30, 1887..... | \$54, 846. 45 |
| For fiscal year ending June 30, 1888..... | 60, 934. 24 |
| For fiscal year ending June 30, 1889..... | 77, 313. 54 |

The total value of imports into this customs district for the last two years has reached about \$5,000,000 per annum.

Of the sixty-four principal customs districts and ports in the United States, as shown by the last report of the Chief of the Bureau of Statistics, in value of importations it ranks tenth in importance in the whole country.

The exports to Mexico through El Paso amounted in the year 1889 to over \$4,250,000 in value, according to statistics published by the Mexican Government.

The growth and extent of business in connection with the handling of mails at El Paso is shown by the following statistics :

| Years. | Amount of money-orders and postal-notes issued. | Amount of money-orders and postal-notes paid. | Stamp sales and box rent. | Years. | Amount of money-orders and postal-notes issued. | Amount of money-orders and postal-notes paid. | Stamp sales and box rent. |
|-----------|---|---|---------------------------|-----------|---|---|---------------------------|
| 1880..... | \$30, 095. 86 | \$1, 929. 94 | | 1885..... | \$69, 042. 44 | \$37, 519. 66 | \$11, 084. 48 |
| 1881..... | 51, 637. 16 | 14, 684. 78 | \$5, 648. 20 | 1886..... | 71, 775. 53 | 49, 109. 03 | 13, 198. 80 |
| 1882..... | 60, 332. 39 | 16, 486. 40 | 7, 643. 31 | 1887..... | 71, 597. 27 | 53, 150. 90 | 14, 731. 8 |
| 1883..... | 74, 386. 80 | 24, 715. 73 | 8, 985. 06 | 1888..... | 73, 157. 16 | 61, 902. 81 | 15, 184. 16 |
| 1884..... | 71, 753. 33 | 29, 757. 15 | 9, 027. 26 | 1889..... | 75, 208. 96 | 64, 871. 28 | 15, 874. 01 |

El Paso has free delivery of mail. A large amount of foreign mail passes through El Paso to and from Mexico. Two terms of the United States circuit and district courts for the western district of Texas are held at El Paso annually.

Among the marks of progress and development to be found in El Paso are the following: Three national banks, two of them being United States depositories, an excellent system of water-works, gas-

works, electric lights, a foundry and machine-shop, ice manufactory, refrigerator and meat-packing establishment, extensive car shops, a railroad bridge and two wagon bridges across the Rio Grande, four street-car lines, two of them being international lines connecting El Paso, Tex., and Juarez, Mexico; a \$70,000 opera-house, a \$98,000 county court-house, four public school buildings, and macadamized streets. Plans are drawn for additional car shops that will employ 300 more men and afford facilities for any repairs of machinery that emergency may demand.

The question of climate and healthfulness is of great importance in the location of a large military post. When put to this test El Paso stands without a rival. Following is a table of comparative statistics of mortality compiled from a report of Dr. Joseph K. Smith as medical director of the military department of Texas. The report includes homicides, suicides, and fatal injuries. Dr. Smith classifies them under the heading "deaths per 1,000 of mean strength," as follows:

| | | | |
|-------------------|--------|---------------------|-------|
| San Antonio..... | 36.806 | Fort Ringgold | 7.574 |
| Fort Brown | 20.528 | Fort Stockton..... | 5.7 |
| Fort Davis..... | 15.565 | El Paso | 5.2 |
| Fort Concho | 13.736 | | |

Substantial citizens of El Paso authorize the statement that whenever the Government shall determine to enlarge the post and remove it to a more favorable location, land will be donated to the Government for that purpose, in such quantity and at such point as the Government shall decide. There are several possible sites within 5 or 15 miles of the city, possessing all requisites as to extent, water supply, drainage, and railroad facilities, and affording ample space for long-range artillery practice.

Wherefore your committee respectfully recommend the passage of the bill with the amendments above indicated.