

A Guide to the Virginia Military Institute Records, 1837-1850

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History

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Descriptive Summary

Accession number

36739

Language

English

Physical Characteristics

.36 cubic feet

Repository

Library of Virginia

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open to research.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

Acquired prior to 1905.

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Separated Material

Oversized materials separated to Miscellaneous Oversized Box.

Historical Information

On March 29, 1839 the General Assembly passed the final version of the act establishing a military school at the Lexington Arsenal, where the students would protect the arms while pursuing educational courses. The School was named the Virginia Military Institute and is the nation's oldest state supported military college. The governor appointed nine members to the Board of Visitors to oversee the new school and they elected Claudius Crozet as president of the board and named Francis H. Smith as the first superintendent. On November 11, 1839 the first corps of cadets reported to VMI and officially replaced the arsenal guard. Cadets to this day perform guard duty and serve the state as a military corps.

VMI is a state-supported, totally undergraduate college organized under the laws of the commonwealth of Virginia and is governed by a Board of Visitors appointed by the governor. The challenging military portion of the VMI program is a distinctive aspect of the VMI college experience, and reflects the Institute's debt to the United States Military Academy and the Ecole Polytechnique in France. All students at VMI are members of the Corps of Cadets and all participate in officer training programs associated with Army, Naval or Air Force ROTC. In accordance with the Code of Virginia, the cadets constitute a military corps. Historically, about twenty percent of VMI's graduates have chosen military careers. Members of the faculty and staff are commissioned in the Virginia Militia by the governor, who serves as ex-officio commander-in-chief. While the military program is an important aspect of the educational experience, the VMI program is specifically designed to produce leaders for peace or war.

Scope and Content

The Virginia Military Institute records are housed in one archival box and are arranged in chronological order between 1837 and 1850. The records include correspondence, reports, merit rolls, returns, accounts, lists, proceedings, statements, and other sundry items. Reports by the Board of Visitors and Superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute represent the most significant documents within these records. The President of the Board of Visitors submits annual reports from the superintendent to the governor, and later, adjutant general. The first report of the Board of Visitors relates to the inspection of the public arms at the Lexington Arsenal according to the law constituting the Board of Visitors of the military school proposed to be established at the Arsenal (1837 Aug. 8). On 2 November 1839, the Board of Visitors writes to Governor David Campbell certifying that the school is ready to go into operation and that a sufficient number of students or cadets have been admitted to guard the public arms and other property at the Lexington Arsenal. The Visitors also ask that the public guard at the Arsenal be disbanded and that the public property be transferred to the Virginia Military Institute. On 21 January 1840, Claudius Crozet, President of the Board of Visitors, transmits the first report of Maj. Francis H. Smith, Principal Professor and later Superintendent, to Governor David Campbell which includes quarterly merit & conduct rolls. Reports to subsequent governors enclose items such as lists of new cadets, merit rolls, accounts, lists of graduates, returns of arms & ordnance, and statements on the condition of the various departments. In addition to reports, Jacob M. Ruff, Treasurer, corresponds with William H. Richardson, Adjutant General, enclosing a statement of the accounts

of the Virginia Military Institute from its commencement to 11 July 1842 (1842 Sept. 1). There are also proceedings by the Board of Visitors regarding charges preferred against Capt. Thomas H. Williamson by Col. Francis H. Smith for gross insubordination, etc. (1845 Sept. 24). Lastly, the report of the Board of Visitors from 4 July 1850, encloses Smith's report to Philip St. George Cocke, President Pro Tem. This report includes a merit roll of cadets; statements exhibiting the condition of the finances, Quarter Master's Department, Subsistence Department, & Tailor's Department; the account of R. E. Colston, Treasurer; an account of the current expenses & Sinking Fund of the Subsistence Department; and a statement of monthly & daily consumption of provisions at the Cadets Commons & Hospital.

Arrangement

Arranged in chronological order.

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Oversized

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