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Letter from the Secretary of War, relative to the completion of Fort Assinaboine, Montana Territory, and the construction of a new post near Wood Mountain in that territory

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LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

RELATIVE TO

The completion of Fort Assinaboine, Montana Territory, and the construction of a new post near Wood Mountain in that Territory.

JANUARY 27, 1880.—Referred to the Committee on Military Affairs and ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington City, January 26, 1880.

The Secretary of War has the honor to invite the attention of Congress to the following extracts from the last annual reports of General A. H. Terry, commanding the Department of Dakota, and of the General of the Army, recommending an appropriation of \$100,000 to complete Fort Assinaboine, Montana Territory, and also an appropriation of \$200,000 to construct a new post near Wood Mountain, Montana, or in that vicinity. General Terry says:

This post (Fort Assinaboine) is now and will be for many years to come a very important one, and it should be enlarged so as to afford quarters for a garrison of twelve companies. Colonel Ruger has recommended an additional appropriation for it of \$125,000. I think that this sum is more than would be absolutely necessary to do the work proposed, but I earnestly recommend that an additional appropriation of \$100,000 be asked for.

I also recommend that an appropriation of \$200,000 be asked for to construct another post in the valley of the Milk River, or upon some one of its lower tributaries. A post in this vicinity is urgently needed to complete the chain which stretches along the northwestern frontier from the Red River of the North toward the Rocky Mountains. The posts now constituting this chain are Forts Pembina, Totten, Buford, and Assinaboine. Between the two last named is an interval of more than 250 miles as the crow flies; and midway of this interval is the great route of communication pursued by the Indians coming from the hostile camps in the Dominion of Canada to the valleys of the Missouri and the Yellowstone, and to the agencies of kindred bands in Dakota.

Favorable as the prospects for peace on the northwestern frontier have become since the successful operations of Colonel Miles, it yet would be most unwise and imprudent to neglect any precaution—any measure of precaution—which would enable us to confront on the threshold a renewed attempt to invade our territory. To fill the gap between Buford and Assinaboine by building a large post in the lower Milk River Valley is the one measure of preparation which the situation imperatively demands. Such a post should be built for a garrison of not less than twelve companies; preferably it should be for sixteen companies. No reconnaissance has been made to determine what resources the lower valley of the Milk River affords for the construction of a post, but I think that owing to the scarcity of suitable timber it would be necessary to build of brick, and whether this would be necessary or not, brick buildings in the rigorous climate of that region would be by far the most desirable.

The sum of \$200,000 would be sufficient, but not more than sufficient, for a post to be garrisoned by twelve companies, and it probably is as much as could be profitably expended on a post in any one year.

The General of the Army, in submitting this report, remarks:

It is only four years since the Yellowstone was the northern defensive line, was infested by the most warlike Indians of the continent, and Congress provided for the building of two new posts thereon, viz, Keogh and Custer. As usual, the building of these posts or places of security has resulted in the rapid settlement of the whole line from Bismarck westward; so that, at the same rate of progress, in two or three years, this line of travel, like that along the Platte, will be able to take care of itself, and Keogh and Custer may be abandoned. Then we will have to move the troops northward, and probably it is wiser to jump to this conclusion and to take post at once along the national boundary, in which event the post referred to by General Terry will be absolutely necessary. I therefore recommend that Congress be asked to appropriate \$100,000 to complete Fort Assinaboine, and \$200,000 to build a new post near Wood Mountain, at some point near the 107th parallel west of Greenwich, the exact spot to be afterward determined by careful exploration, and that the appropriation be made available for two years.

The necessity for these two posts is fully shown in the above remarks, and an early appropriation for the objects named is earnestly recommended in order that material may be forwarded immediately upon the opening of navigation on the Missouri River.

ALEX. RAMSEY,
Secretary of War.

The PRESIDENT
Of the United States Senate.