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Mike Hughes

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Nicholas Tillinghast, the U.S. Army, and Indian Removal by Michael J. Hughes

Introduction

Having just completed reading a book entitled, *Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History*, by S.C. Gwynne, I received David Wilson's BSU News, on September 4, 2015, containing a feature on Nicholas Tillinghast, first principal and instructor at BSU, then the Normal School, Bridgewater. The article was under the heading, Friday's BSC People. It seems Dave was prompted to include this article in his daily news email because Fred Clark, had visited Tillinghast's grave site after his inauguration as the university's 12th president. President Clark chose the date of September 9th to visit the grave because it was on that day 175 years earlier, in 1840, that Tillinghast, as the first principal of the Normal School, Bridgewater, welcomed its first class of seven men and twenty-one women.¹

The email piece, which summarized research done on Principal Tillinghast by Marcia Wakeling, a descendant of his brother, immediately struck me as a coincidental moment because of what she stated in her research summary: "He (Tillinghast) graduated (from West Point) in 1824 and was sent to Fort Gibson in Indian Territory in what is now the State of Oklahoma." Though the *Empire of the Summer Moon* was concerned with how the U.S. Government tried to contain, pacify, eliminate and finally resettle the Comanche, the book did summarize earlier government attempts to contain other tribes before dealing with them. The general area around and including Fort Gibson was discussed in the book in some detail.

Almost instinctively, I asked myself the following questions about Nicholas Tillinghast. What did he do while stationed at Fort Gibson during his two tours of duty there? How did he feel about what was going on during his tours at the fort, especially after the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830? Why was he transferred to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, in order to teach cadets? What was his teaching life like at the Academy? Finally, why did he resign his commission in the army in 1836 after serving twelve years and rising to the rank of captain?

Soon after my initial attempts at finding information to answer these questions I found out that Tillinghast hadn't written anything that has come to light about his time "out west" or at West Point. Even his friend, Richard Edwards, in his memories, delivered as a tribute to Tillinghast, on Bridgewater's Alumni Day, July, 1856, stated, "He was emphatically a man of peace, in feeling and in principle. We refrain from attempting to state his views on this point with any degree of minuteness, for we are not aware that he ever took the pains to make them known in detail."²

I was also informed by an archivist from the National Archives that, "The War Department did not maintain or compile personnel files for Regular Army officers until well after 1863."³ The

¹ Wilson, David. "Bridgewater State University News – September 4, 2015. [email newsletter]"

² Wilson, David (n.d.). "Richard Edwards, class of 1845, Bridgewater State Normal School"
<http://webhost.bridgew.edu/dwilson/re.html>

³ Paul Harrison, Reply letter from National Archives – Archives I Reference Section, 12/2/2015.

National Archives did point me in the direction of, *M665: Returns from Regular Army Infantry Regiments, 1821-1916*. These records are on microfilm and did list N. Tillinghast at Ft. Gibson. I was able to examine these records through Ancestry.com. They also contained a few other bits of information in the form of hand written monthly reports from the commander on the officers and enlisted men, their units, attendance to duty, health conditions, deaths, courts-martial, dismissal, etc. All were in chart form with few details.

I was able to glean some information on Tillinghast at the Fort from a couple of others sources which will be seen in footnotes. Even though these limitations were daunting, I decided that the topic was worth the time and effort and I would try to answer my five questions about Nicholas Tillinghast and his experiences in the army. I decided to use facts about Tillinghast that I could find and integrate them into the historical data that was available in order to share it with anyone interested in this topic.

The Beginnings of Indian Removal

Historian Francis Paul Prucha wrote extensively about the American West and U.S. policy towards Native Americans:

Changing government policy toward the Indians directly affected the deployment of military troops in the West. Changes that came gradually could be met by similar adjustments in army plans, but major or sudden shifts profoundly altered the task of the army and led to unforeseen and sometimes shattering results. Of such a fundamental nature was the policy known as Indian Removal, adopted in the 1820's and carried out in the 1830's. Indian Removal forced a rethinking of defense plans for the western frontier, the establishment of new military posts in regions once thought too far afield, the unsavory task of removing peaceful Indians from their ancestral homes by military force, the demand for a new cavalry arm of the service, and ultimately a drawn-out war in the wilderness of Florida, which seriously drained the resources as well as the patience of the army and the nation.⁴

U.S. Government officials, as far back as Thomas Jefferson's presidency, believed that members of the so called Five Civilized Tribes of Indians, living in the southeastern part of the country, should be relocated to an area beyond white settlement, preferably west of the Mississippi River. A white population surge into these southeastern states after the War of 1812 contributed to the advancement of the possibility of their relocation. Bluntly speaking, the white settlers wanted these tribal lands for their own. The Cherokees were one of the first tribes to adopt a mostly European way of life in the southern areas they lived in and by 1830 a majority of the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Seminoles and Creeks (Muscogee) had become "civilized." This term became controversial and is no longer commonly used to describe indigenous people. In the early 1800s it was universally used to describe Indian groups that chose to co-exist with whites by adopting Christianity, centralized governments with contracts or constitutions, literacy, market

⁴ Prucha, Francis Paul. *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846*. London: Macmillan Company, 1962, p. 251.

participation, intermarriage with whites and even plantation slavery.⁵ In the eyes of whites at that time, the term “civilized” differentiated these tribes from “wild” Indians. This term, of course, has also become controversial or even derogatory to some but in the 1800s it was widely applied to Indian groups that maintained traditional practices such as hunting for food, animist spirituality, illiteracy, trading by barter and tribal social structures and governance. The differences between these two types of Indians will become more important to this discussion later in the article.

President James Monroe’s Secretary of War, John C. Calhoun, believed that the five tribes should be relocated to the west of the Mississippi but not forcibly. They should instead be persuaded that their removal further west would be beneficial to them because it would allow the tribes time to adjust to the culture and technology of the white man.⁶

A group of Cherokee who lived on an area that included southwestern North Carolina, northwestern Georgia and northeastern Alabama, were the first to agree to relocate to Indian Territory, now mostly Oklahoma. As soon as this group arrived in Indian Territory they came into conflict with Osages who had hunted and traded in that area for generations. As a result Calhoun sent a single company of infantry up the Arkansas River in 1817 to Belle Point, where they built Fort Smith, in what is now Arkansas, very near Indian Territory. The idea was to use this furthest western outpost to pacify the area making it more attractive for relocation.⁷ With Colonel Matthew Arbuckle in command of five companies of the 7th Infantry, friction between the Osage and Cherokee tribes was reduced but couldn’t be stopped entirely.

In 1824 the garrison was reinforced with more divisional troops and was ordered by General Winfield Scott, commander of the Western Department of the Army, to move to the mouth of the Verdigris River near where it joins the Arkansas River and the mouth of the Neosho or Grand River. This area has been referred to by many locals as Three Forks.⁸ This move further west was made for two reasons: one, to be closer to the center of the friction between the Cherokee and Osage and, two, to get away from disease ridden Fort Smith. Back in August of 1823, Arbuckle had reported that “loss by deaths had been considerable,” and Scott characterized the post as “an extremely sickly position.”⁹ The same problem was to haunt Arbuckle at his new post on the Grand, which was to become Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. Accordingly, Ft. Smith was abandoned.

Arbuckle quickly made plans to move his companies of infantry upriver to locate a new camp site. Most of the supplies were carried on two keelboats with a few troops poling and navigating them. Most of the garrison went overland by wagon along an Indian trail used by natives, white traders and missionaries.¹⁰

⁵ “Five Civilized Tribes” *Wikipedia*. Accessed 12/14/2015. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Civilized_Tribes

⁶ Agnew, Brad. *Fort Gibson: Terminal of the Trail of Tears*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980, p. 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Foreman, Grant, “Fort Gibson – A brief history.” Rootsweb community (Ancestry.com). Accessed 10/8/2015. <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~texlance/misc/fortgibson.htm>

⁹ Agnew, p. 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Arbuckle picked a site in April 1824 on the Grand River, about three miles from the Verdigris River's mouth because he saw a natural boat landing of shelf rock on the east bank. The river bottom land there was low and fertile and covered by a huge canebrake, trees, vines and undergrowth. Most of this had to be cleared before the soldiers could set up the tents that they would reside in while building the installation. Arbuckle named the site Cantonment Gibson, after the army's commissary general. The term cantonment generally applied to a temporary military camp but was used at this time by the U.S. Army to refer to a new installation. This changed on February 6, 1832, when all cantonments became forts by order of the army.¹¹ Much of the building was completed by May 1824, specifically three sides of the cantonment's breastworks and barracks for the enlisted men. Work on the remaining wall and officer's quarters proceeded more slowly.¹²

Reporting for Duty

Meanwhile on July 1, 1824, nineteen year old (and eight months) Nicholas Tillinghast graduated from West Point as a 2nd Lieutenant and was assigned to the 7th Infantry Division. He was fortunate to have attended the Military Academy at this time in its history because since 1817 the school had been through sweeping reforms under Superintendent Major Sylvanus Thayer. Under the previous administration the Academy had been described by those in the know as "struggling." Secretary of War Calhoun selected Thayer as superintendent with the mission to turn it into a much more professional military school. Thayer had traveled to Europe visiting established military academies there before taking over the reins of the Academy in 1817. With what he learned in France at the École Polytechnique, Thayer "introduced a strict code of discipline, emphasized honor and integrity, formalized and expanded the curriculum, ranked cadets within each class, improved the faculty, and confirmed West Point as the foremost engineering school in the nation. When Thayer left in 1833, the U.S. Military Academy was fully comparable to its European counterparts." Because of all this Thayer became popularly known as "the father of the Military Academy."¹³

According to Richard Edwards in his tribute on Alumni Day, Tillinghast graduated 13th in a class of 31 that started out with 70 freshman or plebes:

But he occupied by no means a low position in the class thus eliminated. His number on the merit roll was thirteen 'which' in language of the venerable Col. Thayer, at that time Superintendent of the Academy, 'was a highly respectable standing, considering that he was then the youngest but five in his class, and that in scholarship, the difference between him and most of those above him was very slight.'¹⁴

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹³ Stewart, Richard W. (Ed.). *American Military History, Volume 1, 1775-1917*. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History the United States Army, 2005, p. 165. <http://www.history.army.mil/books/AMH-V1/AMH-V1-PDF.htm>

¹⁴ Wilson, David (n.d.). "Richard Edwards, class of 1845, Bridgewater State Normal School" <http://webhost.bridgew.edu/dwilson/re.html>

Edwards was inaccurate in Tillinghast's class rank. The *Register of Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy*, commonly referred to as *Cullum's Register*, clearly states his Class of 1824 rank as 14th. There seems to be no doubt, however, that Tillinghast was well prepared theoretically for his duties with the 7th Infantry at Cant. Gibson. Only one member of the Class of 1824, however, was assigned to the prestigious Army Corps of Engineers. He was the brilliant Dennis Hart Mahan, who was ranked number one.¹⁵ Even though Tillinghast was not assigned to the Corps he, like the other graduates, had acquired the mathematical and engineering background needed as officers in the U.S. Army. They would have to use mathematics, physics and mechanics to help design and build fortifications, gun emplacements, bridges, harbors, roads and later railroads. One West Point graduate who acquitted himself very well in the field of railroad building was George Washington Whistler, Class of 1819, and the father of the famous Lowell born painter James Abbott M. Whistler.

Young, Taunton-born 2nd Lt. Tillinghast, (September 22, 1804), according to *Returns from the Army Infantry Regiments for Cont. Gibson, 1821-1831* (hereafter referred to as the *Returns*) is recorded in May 1825 as, "reported for duty at Cantonment Gibson." The next *Returns* lists him as being in Company H.¹⁶

More than ten months elapsed between Nicholas's graduation and when he reported for duty at Cant. Gibson. There is no information on what he did during those months in addition to traveling from New York or New England to Indian Territory. One can only speculate on what he did based on what is known about army protocol and travel conditions of the time. Although this writer recognizes that speculation has little place in sound or accurate history, in this case it gives us food for thought concerning what it was like to be in the military and travel at this time in U.S. history.

Upon graduation from the Academy it is very likely that, as in modern times, newly commissioned officers were given leave to go home before reporting to their first duty assignment. Presently the graduates get thirty days leave and Tillinghast and his classmates probably got at least that if not more. After his leave was up he most likely had to report back to West Point or some other military installation to prepare for his trip across the country to Cant. Gibson. He may have traveled alone or with a detachment also assigned there. No source tells us what route he took, how he traveled and how long it took, but the possibilities can be narrowed down to logical ones.

Tillinghast, like most travelers to any place west of the Mississippi River, headed for St. Louis, the gateway to the west. The first steamboat to arrive in St. Louis, the unusual looking *Zebulon*

¹⁵ Phipps, Michael, "Mahan at West Point 'Gallic Bias' and the 'Old Army': The Subconscious of Leadership at Gettysburg." Ninth Annual Gettysburg National Military Park Seminar, 2002. Accessed 12/18/2015.

http://nps.history.com/series/symposia/gettysburg_seminars/9/essay1.pdf

¹⁶ Ancestry.com. *U.S. Returns from Regular Army Infantry Regiments, 1821-1916* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011. Accessed 12/15/2015. Original data: *Returns from Regular Army Infantry Regiments, June 1821–December 1916*. NARA microfilm publication M665, rolls 1-244, 262-292, 297-300 of 300. Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, Record Group 94, and Records of United States Regular Army Mobile Units, 1821-1942, Record Group 391. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

Pike, did so on July 27, 1817.¹⁷ A number of sources state that any trip from New York or New England to St. Louis prior to 1830 would take a minimum of six weeks to complete.¹⁸ The mode of travel for most would be a combination of available roads and river travel by boat. Many of the major roads leading west from the eastern seaboard through the Appalachian Mountains ended at cities on the Ohio River. A traveler would take a boat down the Ohio to the Mississippi to St. Louis. Travel by water in the 1820s was the fastest and most reliable way to go but travel by road was problematical. There were a small number of roads built from cities in the east that ran through the Appalachian Mountains to ports on the Ohio River. Two of the most widely used were the Pennsylvania Road and the National Road. The Pennsylvania Road was started in Philadelphia in 1725 and finished, incrementally under various names, in Pittsburgh, on the Ohio River in 1804.¹⁹ The Pennsylvania Road was financed and built by private companies that were granted the right to charge tolls in order to make a profit on their investment. The National Road from Cumberland, Maryland, on the upper Potomac River, ran to what is now Wheeling, West Virginia (then Virginia) on the Ohio River. It ran through the Cumberland Gap and was started in 1811 and finished in 1818.²⁰ The National Road was built by the federal government. Most who traveled on these for non-commercial reasons used stage coaches or rode on horseback. If Tillinghast used either it was most likely the Pennsylvania Road which would have been the most direct route from New York or New England; however, the National Road would most likely have cost him less to travel on. Young Nicholas would have taken advantage of a number of stopping places along the road. These would have been taverns and inns used by travelers for refreshment, meals and lodging. Stage coaches would change horses and a single rider needed to rest and feed his mount.

We should probably mention two other remote possibilities as his possible routes of travel west. These would be the Erie Canal, which was completed in 1825, and a coastal ship voyage down the east coast, around Florida, into the Gulf of Mexico and up the Mississippi River. These two would not be logical choices for Nicholas because the army would be footing the bill for the trip and the first was too far north and the second would be presumably too long. Both of these routes would have been very expensive.

Once in St. Louis Tillinghast would have stayed at least a couple of days at an army post to acquire two horses, one for riding and one as a pack horse and gather a kit together which would include everything needed for the last leg of the journey: arms, clothes, camping supplies and food. This leg of the trip would be the most rugged for him. It was 460 miles to Cant. Gibson over landscape steadily rising to the Ozark Plateau which continued into Indian Territory.²¹ He would also have to contend with crossing numerous rivers and streams. We do know a little about what this part of the trip was like because an army acquaintance of his and possibly his

¹⁷ O'Neil, Tim. "Steamboats Make St. Louis a Bustling, Prosperous City", *Look Back 250 – Stltoday.com – St. Louis Post Dispatch*, (April 19, 2014). Accessed 12/21/2015. http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/look-back/look-back-steamboats-make-st-louis-a-bustling-prosperous-city/article_fc71a7c5-a22c-586f-a28f-9847f6e4be12.html

¹⁸ McMichael, Kelly. "Changes in Transportation." *Texas Learning Object Repository*. 2008. Accessed 12/16/2015. http://tdl.org/txlor-dspace/bitstream/handle/2249.3/684/05_changes_transport.htm

¹⁹ Beyer, George R. "Pennsylvania Roads Before the Automobile", *Historic Pennsylvania Leaflet No. 33*, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1971, p. 1.

²⁰ "National Road", *Wikipedia*. Accessed 12/19/2015. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Road.

²¹ Missouri and Oklahoma, *Hammond Medallion World Atlas*, Maplewood, N.J.: Hammond Incorporated, 1980, pp. 260, 288.

former student at the Academy, 2nd Lieutenant William W. Mather, described a similar journey he took from St. Louis to then Ft. Gibson, in a letter he wrote on Dec. 22, 1835, ten years after Tillinghast made his trip. Mather wrote,

I arrived here yesterday in safety and in health, after a fatiguing journey of 460 miles across the country from St. Louis. During the route I have not seen a bridge of any kind, but have forded all the streams. Several of them are the size of the Quinebaugh [Connecticut] some larger, and many are smaller. Two of them I forded eight times each and several two or three times. Many of them are very rapid and once my pack horse came near being washed away. I carried an Indian rubber cloth for camping out, by which I could be perfectly protected from the wet ground and rain, and which I could in a few minutes make into a boat for crossing rivers when they were too deep to ford. I did not have occasion to use it. It has been pleasant weather all the time....I was on my journey....²²

Being generous by allowing Nicholas two months leave at home and eight weeks to travel to Cant. Gibson still leaves six months unaccounted for between his graduation and reporting for duty in May 1825. It is useless to speculate on what he was doing during those months because of the complete absence of any information which might aid us in efforts to find out.

His First Tour of Duty on the Frontier

What was going on at Cant. Gibson when Tillinghast reported for duty in 1825? According to Brad Agnew, in his book *Fort Gibson: Terminal of the Trail of Tears*, when Nicholas arrived the 7th Infantry at the cantonment was actively engaged in trying to “maintain peace” between conflicting tribes of Indians. This was becoming an increasingly difficult task because “fifty-thousand Eastern aboriginal immigrants reestablished themselves in new homes.”²³ Tillinghast, as a new 2nd Lieutenant, was placed right in the middle of these efforts. Also “soldiers surveyed boundaries, constructed roads, escorted delegations of Eastern Indians on reconnaissances of the region, established relations with the Plains tribes, mediated intertribal disputes, and attempted to implement the government’s removal policy in dozens of other ways.”²⁴

Let’s examine this paragraph more closely in relation to how Tillinghast may have been involved in all of this. He certainly would have had a role in the boundary surveying and road construction but as a 2nd Lieutenant he would have carried out orders that came down to him through the chain of command starting with Col. Arbuckle and passed down through his Company H commander, Capt. William Davenport, and 1st Lt. J.B. Many.²⁵ It’s a good bet that he would have been ordered to directly supervise a squad or more of men in the actual labor of surveying and building of roads.

²² Letter dated December 22, 1835, as cited in Foreman, Carolyn Thomas. “Reports from Fort Gibson.” *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 31(2), 1953. p. 205. Accessed 12/19/2015.

<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Chronicles/v031/v031p205.pdf>

²³ Agnew, p. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Returns*, October, 1825.

It seems that at this time in the long process of Indian Removal, tribes weren't just resettled by being placed on land around Cant. Gibson at the discretion of the army but were instead allowed to check out or "reconnoiter" sites they wanted to settle on escorted by members of the garrison at the cantonment. It seems that selected members of each tribe to be relocated were allowed to travel to the area to do just that. This would be in keeping with the policy, still in place, of not forcibly resettling groups of the Five Civilized Tribes. It is also reasonable to assume that the garrison escorts would be led by an officer, probably a captain or lieutenant. Tillinghast may have done some escorting as part of his job at the installation. There is a slight hint of something like this in the *Returns* from November 1825, where it was recorded that he was "absent on command."²⁶ Most of the *Returns* from 1825 to 1827 state little concerning Tillinghast except for "present for duty."

By April 1827 Arbuckle reported that the breastworks for the cantonment were finally completed. Breastworks were actually low earthen walls. In this case it is unclear, because sources differ, whether these had stockade like log pickets on top or whether they were just a stockade and called breastworks. All buildings had to be built with materials fabricated by the troops from the plentiful oak trees in the surrounding area. Pickets were hewn, planks hand-sawed and shingles were split by members of the garrison. Buildings were made of logs, which because they were green, lasted a short time. Milled lumber and pine for sashes had to be brought up the Arkansas River so they were in short supply. Mud was used to fill cracks and joints.²⁷ Tillinghast must have been involved in this work in one way or another.

Arbuckle also instituted a bimonthly mail service using a military courier. This postal service was also utilized by a nearby mission and traders in the area.²⁸ This is how the *Returns*, other reports, requests and orders were sent to and from the cantonment.

With activity around the site increasing dramatically, a better means of communication and transportation between Cant. Gibson, Ft. Smith and Little Rock, Arkansas, was needed. In March 1825, Congress authorized a survey for a new road between Cant. Gibson and Little Rock. The Secretary of War directed Arbuckle to build the road using his own troops and without additional funds, tools, supplies or personnel supplied from Washington. Arbuckle balked at this because he was already spread thin building the remaining structures of the cantonment and additional fortifications. The garrison was also scattered in road building parties and the Colonel wanted his men nearby in case of problems with Indians.²⁹

After haggling back and forth, with the Indian danger subsiding and more pressure from the Adjutant General, Arbuckle assigned Captain Pierce M. Butler and a detachment of fifty-five soldiers the task of constructing the section of the new road between Cant. Gibson and Ft. Smith. According to Agnew, "By late August, 1827, Butler had completed the road as far as Fort Smith, and civilian contractors had been hired to construct most of the remainder of the road to Little Rock."³⁰

²⁶ *Ibid.*, November, 1825.

²⁷ Agnew, p. 31.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p 32.

Many of the *Returns* from 1827 tell us that Captain P.M. Butler was the commander of Company H at the cantonment. Until April of that year Nicholas Tillinghast was the 2nd Lieutenant of the same company so it is more than reasonable to assume that he was actively involved in the construction going on at Cant. Gibson and the road to Ft. Smith until he was reassigned to Company C and then ordered to West Point in May 1827.

Before leaving this section of the discussion it is important to examine the relationship between the army and the Indian tribes in the surrounding territory.

Many of us now have retained the notion that the U.S. Army and tribes in Indian Territory were natural enemies and were constantly fighting each other. Much of this thinking can be attributed to popular fiction written later in the 19th century and even later to Hollywood depictions of conflicts between the two. While the army and Plains tribes fifty years after this time fought often, in the 1820s and 1830s the army and the tribes in Indian Territory were not enemies. Agnew summarizes this well when he writes,

Charged with executing a policy many Indians bitterly opposed, the army at Fort Gibson became the natural adversary of the tribes residing in the vicinity. Newspapers and letters of the time suggest that conflict was anticipated, and on several occasions war hysteria swept the region. Yet during the emotionally charged years of Indian removal there were no clashes between the Indians and soldiers from Fort Gibson, no Indian was killed by the army, and only one soldier from the post died at the hands of the Indians. The study of army-Indians relations at Fort Gibson during the era of removal indicates considerable restraint on both sides and suggests that sweeping indictments concerning the inhumanity of the army to the Indians during the period of removal must be qualified. During the 1820's and 1830's, the troops at Fort Gibson assisted in the resettlement of the immigrant Indians and cushioned the cultural shock caused by the clash of two divergent cultures.³¹

Even though officers and men of Cant. Gibson shared the attitudes, ambitions and prejudices of most civilians in the area, unlike those civilians the soldiers were not engaged in trade with these tribes and were not vying for their land, so the army represented the interests of the tribes more conscientiously than any other institution on the frontier. Generally speaking, regular army officers were only responsible to the federal government and were better able to resist popular pressure from civilians in the area and surrounding states in their anti-Indian wishes, ideas and actions. Because of the situation they found themselves in at the post, the officers there were more apt to protect the rights of Indians.³² Colonel Arbuckle, during his twenty years in command of the Southwestern frontier developed a close relationship with Indians.³³

Agnew's assertion that "there were no clashes between the Indians and soldiers from Fort Gibson, no Indian was killed by the army, and only one soldier from the post died at the hands of

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Indians,” is a remarkable achievement, especially so with the enlisted men. Certainly enlisted men came into contact with Indians around and near the post but while their contact with these natives under the supervision of the officers may have been without conflict, what about their individual encounters? There were steps taken by Colonel Arbuckle and his officers which kept enlisted men in line when it came to their individual relationships with Indians.

Though the average soldier was kept busy during each day at the cantonment, boredom was common because of the structured military life he lived under. After an early breakfast, his routine duties consisted of being in a detail that tended the vegetable garden or fed, wintered and cared for oxen, horses and mules. If a new recruit, he would be “put through drills by the sharp commands of officers,” like 2nd Lt. Tillinghast.³⁴

Certain diversions were allowed when the men had time off. These included fishing in the river, hunting the thousands of prairie chickens and other plentiful game around the post as well as playing billiards in a room provided at the post. The men were also encouraged to write and perform in plays which could be staged in a building used for Indian councils and religious services.³⁵ Horse races were very popular with all the people inside the post and outside it, including enlisted men, officers, Indians and traders. A course was laid out especially for the races and entries came from all the groups involved with the post. Betting was allowed with stakes getting quite high at times.³⁶

Unions between soldiers of the cantonment and Cherokee girls were common. The fact that many of these Cherokee maidens were charming and available made them sought after by the officers and men for dances and parties. Many soldiers stayed in the area after their enlistments ended, married Indian girls, raised families and became prosperous from land holdings acquired as a result of their union. According to Foreman, “The result was that in that part of Oklahoma which formerly constituted the Cherokee Nation, many families descended from unions between the soldiers and Indians.”³⁷

Some diversions available to the enlisted men at the post were not tolerated by the commander and his officers at the post. Cheap bars that provided alcohol and gambling were run by mixed-blood Cherokees on tribal land and this caused many problems for the officers at the post. Drunkenness and desertion were the most persistent and difficult violations with which the officers had to deal. Soldiers were strictly forbidden to remain outside the post after retreat was sounded by the drums and the main gate closed and locked. There were frequent violations of this rule. Courts-martial inflicted quite harsh punishments on those convicted of these transgressions. Those found guilty had their names, offenses and sentences recorded in the *Returns*.

Some of the punishments prescribed were unique and imaginative:

³⁴ Agnew, p. 25.

³⁵ Foreman.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

As an instance of punishment, an offender was sentenced to ‘stand on the head of a barrel with and empty bottle in each hand, in front of the dragoon guardhouse every alternate two hours from reveille until retreat for eight days with a board around his neck marked ‘Whiskey Seller,’ to carry a pack on his back weighing fifty pounds every alternate two hours for eight days, from reveille to retreat; to work at hard labor in charge of the guard for fourteen days, and to have seven days of his pay stopped.

Another culprit was sentenced “to be drummed around the garrison immediately in the rear of Corporal Charles Kelloun of H Company, First Dragoons, carrying a keg in his arms, to have a plank hanging on his back marked ‘Whiskey Runner,’ and to serve fifteen days at hard labor in charge of the guard, making good all lost by sickness.”³⁸

It seems reasonable to conclude that with sporting and social activities provided by the post, as well as the availability of female Indian companionship and harsh punishments meted out for drunkenness and desertion, the enlisted personnel at Cantonment Gibson had no reason to have serious conflicts with the Indians they encountered there. Major problems with the tribes around Cant. Gibson continued with a few of the more serious ones described in the following paragraphs.

Conflicts between the newly settled Cherokee, their allies the Delaware, and the Osage continued, and by mid-summer 1826 the frontier was on the verge of war. One of the main causes was the killing of Red Hawk, a nephew of a respected Cherokee chief, Thomas Graves. Red Hawk had been hunting with a party of Cherokee in January 1823, when a party of twenty Osage attacked them and killed him. Colonel Arbuckle was unsuccessful at trying to convince the Osage to turn the perpetrator over to him. Arbuckle, through delicate negotiations between the two tribes was successful at stalling planned retributions against the Osage by the Cherokee for Red Hawk’s murder.³⁹ Animosity between the tribes continued with incidents of horse stealing, killing of livestock and damaging of property being the most serious breaches of the tenuous peace between them. On July 18, 1826, an Osage was found killed and scalped near a white trader’s house. Some of the trader’s livestock was also stolen. The Osage believed their tribe member was killed by the Cherokee or Delaware in retaliation for the unresolved Red Hawk murder. As previously stated tribal war was imminent by mid-summer. This ugly situation was finally defused when, with the intercession of the Osage agent, the suspected murderer of Red Hawk was turned over to Colonel Arbuckle at Cant. Gibson on August 24, 1826. In addition, Arbuckle was able to hammer out a truce agreement between the conflicted tribes. The truce included an agreement by which each tribe would respect the other’s right to solely hunt in certain areas. An interesting addition to the truce included an agreement by each tribe to pay a \$1,000 penalty for taking the life of members of the other tribe.⁴⁰ As with most truce agreements between newly resettled tribes and established ones, this one ended up being a temporary fix for problems that the army had to constantly deal with. At no time, however, was there a real threat to whites by Indians despite the fear some whites had based on rumor and falsehoods.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Agnew, p. 25.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Another example took place in 1824 with the anticipated arrival of more immigrants of Eastern tribes to Cant. Gibson. To make room for them the army had to get the Osage to turn over some of their hunting grounds to the U.S. Government for resettlement purposes. The Osage tribe was the only established group in the area that had permanent villages.⁴¹ They were not totally dependent on hunting bison and other game for their existence as tribes like the Comanche and Kiowa were. These last two would be considered “wild” Indians by most whites. Colonel Arbuckle’s job, surely with the aid of some of his most trusted officers (Tillinghast?), was to negotiate with the Osage to get them to relinquish some of their land so that it could be occupied by Eastern tribe members. In 1825 the Osage met with Indian Commissioner William Clark (of Lewis and Clark fame) in St. Louis, and ceded all their lands to the government except a reservation in what is now Southern Kansas. Not all the members of the tribe agreed to leave their land, however. The government then proceeded to subdivide the area amongst Eastern tribes after negotiating removal treaties with them.⁴²

The Choctaw were the first “new” tribe to emigrate in 1825. Remember, some Cherokee known now as “Old Settlers” had already voluntarily resettled. The Choctaw were followed by the Creek after that group split over whether to accept the relocation or removal treaty.⁴³ The Chickasaw also had internal disagreements over whether to sign a removal treaty or not. All of these Civilized Tribes did “scout out” possible resettlement sites before moving. These conflicting tribal attitudes delayed but didn’t halt removal, however.

Another problem had its beginnings in 1816 when the Cherokee’s government agent, William Lovely, negotiated a deal between the Osage and Cherokee at Three Forks. The agreement stated that the Osage tribe would allow the Cherokee tribe access to their hunting ground. The agreement provided the Cherokee a seven-million-acre tract of Osage hunting land in return for a promise by Lovely that the government would reimburse the Cherokee and whites who had claims against them. The cession was to be popularly known as Lovely’s Purchase and included the region north of the Arkansas River, extending from the Western Cherokee’s settlements to the Verdigris River. The Osage believed that the deal gave the Cherokee the land but not “all the Beaver, Bear, Buffaloe [sic] and Deer on our lands – we Sold.”⁴⁴ By 1823 white settlers had flowed into the Lovely Purchase and threatened to surround the Cherokee. Secretary of War Calhoun reissued an order banning white settlement in the area and ordered the removal of unauthorized whites. Arkansas increased the pressure on the federal government to open up Lovely Purchase to white settlement.⁴⁵ After continuous debating with the governor of Arkansas aggressively promoting white settlement in Lovely Purchase, the U.S. Senate ratified a treaty on May 6, 1828, moving the “Old Settlers” (Western Cherokee) to a seven-million acre tract west of Lovely’s Purchase. This tract did include several million choice acres of Lovely’s Purchase and Arkansas had to move its western boundary 40 miles further east. The Cherokee were angry and protested as best they could but eventually packed up and moved.⁴⁶

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61-62.

By 1826 Cherokees, Delawares and Pawnees were settling on the Red River beyond government military posts. This antagonized large and powerful Plains tribes such as the Comanche and Kiowa. At the time the Red River was considered the border between the United States and Mexico. Because of conflicts that developed between the Indian immigrants and these Plains tribes, frontier commanders like Arbuckle were charged with making contacts with these buffalo hunting horsemen. Most efforts by the army to accomplish this were futile mainly because, as Gwynne states in *Empire of the Summer Moon*, using infantry and even dragoons (basically mounted infantry) to contact and deal with the “best light cavalry in the world” was a major example of military incompetence on the part of the U.S. Army and the federal government.⁴⁷ It wasn't until later in history when well trained cavalry was used by the army that the Plains tribes were brought under control.

Nicholas Tillinghast was at Cantonment Gibson throughout most of the years in which these events took place, specifically between May 1825 and May 1827. What role he played in any of them is not actually known. The *Returns* only state “present for duty.”

Back to School

Nicholas Tillinghast, still a 2nd Lieutenant in the infantry, was ordered to the United States Military Academy, at West Point, New York, in May 1827. He was to be an instructor assigned to teach chemistry, mineralogy and geology by Superintendent Sylvanus Thayer. Thayer, had occupied that post when Nicholas was a student. The Superintendent, also a Massachusetts native (Braintree), may have requested that Tillinghast be transferred to the Academy from Cant. Gibson. Evidently Thayer was impressed with the quality of the graduates in the Class of 1824 because two classmates of Nicholas were also selected to teach at the Academy.

John W.A. Smith, who graduated second in the Class of 1824, was assigned to the Academy upon graduation as an Assistant Instructor of Mathematics, which he taught from August to November 1824. From November 1824 to March 1826 he taught chemistry, mineralogy and geology, the same three sciences Tillinghast taught when he was first assigned to the Academy.⁴⁸ As previously mentioned, Dennis Hart Mahan -- the top ranked cadet in the Class of 1824 -- was not only the sole member of the Class to be assigned to the Corps of Engineers, he, like Smith, went directly to teaching mathematics at the Academy upon graduation. Actually, he was such a brilliant student, Thayer had previously appointed him as an Assistant Professor of Mathematics, during his third year as an undergraduate. When Tillinghast arrived at West Point to teach, Mahan was on leave in Europe studying advanced engineering techniques and military institutions. When he returned from Europe he was assigned a professorship in engineering and taught that discipline and related ones from January 1832 to September 1871. Mahan became a renowned expert in military engineering, especially the engineering of fortifications. He was a fellow faculty member with Nicholas from July 1832 to October 1834.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Gwynne, S.C. *Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History*. New York: Scribner, 2010, p. 32.

⁴⁸ “John W.A. Smith, 362”, Cullum's *Register of Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy*. Vol. 1, p. 325-326. Accessed 1/2/2016.

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United_States/Army/USMA/Cullums_Register/362*.html.

⁴⁹ “Dennis Hart Mahan.” *Wikipedia*, Accessed 12/31/2015. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dennis_Hart_Mahan

Tillinghast taught chemistry, mineralogy and geology from August 1827 to April 1829. On June 30, 1830 he was promoted to the rank of 1st Lieutenant and continued teaching the same subjects from August to November, 1830. He was then assigned as an Assistant Professor of Geography, History and Ethics and was most likely replaced by someone else in the teaching of the three sciences he started teaching at the school. Tillinghast taught the latter three subjects from November 30, 1830 to October 14, 1834.⁵⁰

Assistant Professor Tillinghast taught 1st Classmen or seniors. The curriculum, which had been set up by Thayer, was essentially the same as when Nicholas was a cadet. For freshmen (4th Classmen) and sophomores (3rd Classmen) mathematics and French were stressed. In freshman year cadets took 3 hours of mathematics in the morning and 3 hours of French in the afternoon of each day of the year which ran from September 1st to July 1st, including Saturdays. The same held true for sophomore year with one slight difference, that being the instruction hours of French were cut in half and Drawing (drafting) was added to fill the hours.⁵¹

The reason mathematics was stressed so much was clearly stated by the Committee of Military Affairs, U.S. Military Academy, May 17, 1834:

Mathematics is the study which forms the foundation of the course [of study at the United States Military Academy]. This is necessary, both to impart to the mind that combined strength and versatility, that peculiar vigor and rapidity of comparison necessary for military action, and to pave the way for progress in the higher military sciences.⁵²

French was stressed for a much more utilitarian reason. There were very few adequate mathematics textbooks in English that were appropriate for the needs of the Academy's cadets. Up-to-date French textbooks brought back by Thayer were introduced, which meant that cadets had to be able to read basic French.

Thayer's curriculum, from the chart entitled "U.S.M.A. Curriculum 1823," slotted the subjects that Tillinghast taught for 1st Class cadets (seniors). Each cadet would take a total of 130 hours of Mineralogy, Geology and Chemistry, 6.5 hours each day for 130 days, and 516 hours of Geography, History, Ethics and Natural Law, 2 hours each day for 258 days.⁵³

⁵⁰ "Nicholas Tillinghast, 374." Cullum's *Register of Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy*. Vol. 1, p. 330. Accessed 12/3/2015.
http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United_States/Army/USMA/Cullums_Register/374*.html

⁵¹ Rickey, V. Frederick. & Shell-Gellasch, Amy. "Mathematics Education at West Point: The First Hundred Years – Sylvanus Thayer and the New Academy." *MAA 100 (Mathematics Association of America)*. Accessed 1/14/2016.
<http://www.maa.org/press/periodicals/convergence/mathematics-education-at-west-point-the-first-hundred-years-sylvanus-thayer-and-the-new-academy>

⁵² As cited in Rickey & Shell-Gellasch, "Mathematics Education at West Point: The First Hundred Years – Introduction." *MAA 100 (Mathematics Association of America)*.
<http://www.maa.org/press/periodicals/convergence/mathematics-education-at-west-point-the-first-hundred-years-introduction>

⁵³ Rickey & Shell-Gellasch, "Mathematics Education at West Point: The First Hundred Years – Sylvanus Thayer and the New Academy."

Classes, especially for 4th Classmen, were divided into sections containing 12 to 14 men each. The heavy load that each professor had was lightened by using assistant professors like Tillinghast. The professor would deliver lectures to large groups of students, presumably a number of sections, for an hour. Three hours of instruction would follow the next day and would be under the supervision of an assistant professor for each section with the professor taking one section. The instruction would consist mainly of student recitation with the cadet explaining the previous lecture and/or reading assignment or a problem assigned. The average recitation would last about 15 minutes and would include a period of time for questions by the assistant professor at the end of it. Students would be able to use assigned blackboards to help them explain a problem especially in mathematics or any of the sciences. The professor could rotate the section he would teach and also observe other sections occasionally asking questions. Many assistant professors were recent graduates and in some cases were upper class cadets who were especially strong in mathematics.⁵⁴

Cadets were graded every day and these grades were reported to the Superintendent daily. Instructors used a “scale as follow: 3, thorough, 2.5, good, 2, fair, 1.5 imperfect, 1, bad, 0, failure.” These were used to rank each cadet and were posted in every department every Monday, at noon, for four years.⁵⁵ This is how Nicholas ended his four years at West Point with a ranking of 14th in the Class of 1824. These weekly grade averages were also used to resection the cadets. The idea of grading cadets every day was the core of Thayer’s philosophy and this method of instruction, which quickly became known as the ‘Thayer method’, was in use in all departments for the entire century.⁵⁶

Cadets were sectioned in their class by order of merit and rank. Thayer brought this idea from the École Polytechnique. The sectioning was mainly based on their ability in mathematics with the top section taking the most difficult classes in all subjects. A Mathematical Association of America history of mathematics education at West Point credits Thayer with “the institution of bi-annual exams, in the style of the École. Cadets were examined twice each year, in December and June. This took place in front of the Academic Board and, in June, the Board of Visitors also.”⁵⁷

During his tenure at the Academy, Tillinghast likely taught a number of students who distinguished themselves in academic pursuits as well as in the military. A number of them would become well known for their leadership in the Mexican War and the Civil War. Like Tillinghast earlier, these students had to pass stiff entrance requirements to get admitted to West Point. According to John C. Waugh, in his article *Life at West Point of Future Professional American Civil War Officers*, “Each had been appointed by a U.S. congressman, was no younger than 16 and no older than 21, measured at least five feet tall, had no deformities, and was fit for

⁵⁴ Rickey & Shell-Gellasch, “Mathematics Education at West Point: The First Hundred Years – Teaching at the Academy.” <http://www.maa.org/press/periodicals/convergence/mathematics-education-at-west-point-the-first-hundred-years-teaching-at-the-academy>

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

the rigors of military duty. Each one had demonstrated proficiency in fundamental arithmetic. And every one of them was single; even overtly having a girlfriend was grounds for dismissal.”⁵⁸

Marcia Wakeling, whose research was summarized in *Nicholas Tillinghast, first principal and instructor*, stated, “Robert E. Lee, who later commanded the Confederate Army [of Northern Virginia] in the Civil War, was one of Tillinghast’s students. Lee’s biographer, Douglas Southall Freeman, mentions Lieutenant Tillinghast in his book.”⁵⁹ Lee, who graduated in the Class of 1829, was “the best-behaved cadet in West Point history and went on to become easily the school’s most popular superintendent.” Lee ended up ranked second in his class with no demerits at all in his four years at the Academy.⁶⁰

One of Lee’s classmates was Joseph E. Johnston who was ranked number 13 in the class. Johnston would later be the Confederate Commander of the Department of the West and was blamed for retreating from the Battles of Chattanooga and Atlanta in the Civil War.

In addition to these two, the following noteworthy individuals will be highlighted as cadets at the Academy during the time Tillinghast taught there. Some might have had him as an instructor but without more in-depth research than this topic requires it will not be substantiated.

Jefferson Davis, Class of 1828, became the future President of the Confederate States of America. He graduated number 23 in a class of 33. As a 1st Lieutenant of 1st Dragoons he was stationed at Fort Gibson from August 1833 to February 1834.⁶¹ Albert E. Church, also a member of the Class of 1828, graduated first in class rank and became a noted mathematics professor at the Academy and the author of many textbooks in mathematics.⁶²

William N. Pendleton, was a member of the Class of 1830. He graduated 5th in that class and served as a mathematics professor at the Academy from August 1831 to September 1832. He would have been a member of the faculty with Tillinghast during those years. In the Civil War Pendleton was the artillery commander of Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia.⁶³ John B. Magruder was also a member of the Class of 1830 and could have been a student of Tillinghast. He

⁵⁸ Waugh, John C. “Life at West Point of Future Professional American Civil War Officers.” *Civil War Times*. May, 2002. Accessed 12/18/2015. <http://www.historynet.com/life-at-west-point-of-future-professional-american-civil-war-officers.htm>

⁵⁹ Wilson, David. “Nicholas Tillinghast, first principal and instructor.” *Friday’s BSC People*. Accessed 9/4/2015. <http://webhost.bridgew.edu/dwilson/nicholas.html>

⁶⁰ Waugh, p. 10.

⁶¹ “Jefferson Davis, 530.” *Cullum’s Register of Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy*. Vol. 1, p. 416. Accessed 1/2/2016. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United_States/Army/USMA/Cullums_Register/530*.html

⁶² “Albert E. Church, 508.” *Cullum’s Register of Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy*. Vol. 1, p. 404. Accessed 1/2/2016. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United_States/Army/USMA/Cullums_Register/508*.html

⁶³ “William N. Pendleton, 591.” *Cullum’s Register of Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy*. Vol. 1, p. 450. Accessed 1/2/2016. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United_States/Army/USMA/Cullums_Register/591*.html

graduated 15th in his class and became an artilleryman and a hero in the Mexican War, 1846. In the Civil War he was a general in the Army of Northern Virginia.⁶⁴

Jacob W. Bailey was ranked 4th in his Class of 1832 and became a Professor of Chemistry, Mineralogy and Geology, at West Point from March 1834 to February 1857.⁶⁵ While teaching there he pioneered the development of the microscope in the field of botany.⁶⁶ He would have been a fellow faculty member of Tillinghast's for a little over seven months.

One of the most notorious failures at the Academy was Edgar Allan Poe, Class of 1830. He did well in mathematics and French but little else drew his attention except for poetry. Constantly in need of money he was helped by the usually strict Superintendent Thayer who allowed him to publish a collection of poems. Thayer deducted the 75 cent price of each copy from each cadet's pay so that Poe could have some ready cash. This wasn't enough however, because Poe's financial and personal problems increased. He was finally dismissed from the school after a court martial for excessive demerits acquired because of "failure to attend class, parade, roll calls and chapel."⁶⁷ Rumors that he showed up for drill naked are unsubstantiated. Later in life the only positive thing Poe would say about his experiences at West Point was that Thayer was fair with him.

The Poe case highlights one of the problems Thayer had to deal with while Superintendent:

Superintendent Thayer had always demanded a free hand in discharging cadets he believed unsuited to the ideals he established. When Andrew Jackson became President, everything changed. Thayer would dismiss a man for good reason; then Jackson, for political reasons, would return him by presidential order. Finally, not wanting Jackson's apparent personal animosity toward him to wreak further havoc on the military academy, Thayer resigned as Superintendent. Stunned, every cadet and professor shook his hand in farewell. Then the man who had educated 711 "sons" boarded a boat on the Hudson and quietly took his leave. He never returned.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ "John B. Magruder, 601." Cullum's *Register of Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy*. Vol. 1, p. 455-456. Accessed 1/2/2016.

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United_States/Army/USMA/Cullums_Register/601*.html

⁶⁵ "Jacob W. Bailey, 666." Cullum's *Register of Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy*. Vol. 1, p. 501. Accessed 1/2/2016.

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United_States/Army/USMA/Cullums_Register/666*.html

⁶⁶ Waugh, p. 11.

⁶⁷ Schogol, Jeff. "Why was Edgar Allan Poe Kicked out of West Point?" *Stars and Stripes: Rumor Doctor blog archive*. (February 4, 2011). Accessed 1/9/2016. <http://www.stripes.com/blogs/the-rumor-doctor/the-rumor-doctor-1.104348/why-was-edgar-allan-poe-kicked-out-of-west-point-1.133805>

⁶⁸ Campion, Nardi Reeder. "Who Was Sylvanus Thayer?" *Dartmouth Engineer Magazine* (Fall 2004). Accessed 12/31/2015. <http://engineering.dartmouth.edu/magazine/who-was-sylvanus-thayer>. Thayer returned to the Army Corps of Engineers and became chief engineer of the Boston area overseeing the construction of Fort Warren (Georges Island) and Fort Independence (Castle Island) to defend Boston Harbor.

Thayer's resignation must have been difficult for Tillinghast to deal with. He and his fellow instructors must have been concerned with who would take Thayer's place and what effect the new superintendent would have on the Academy and their careers there. He was still teaching geography, history and ethics and had not risen above his academic designation of assistant professor.

Thayer's successor was René Edward de Russy.⁶⁹ He served as Superintendent for five years and didn't make any major changes in the policies and procedures at West Point during his time there. He was very cultured and well-liked while at the Academy.

The major event which was to affect Tillinghast's military career while he was teaching at West Point was the passage by Congress of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. According to historian Francis Paul Prucha, "This legislation did not threaten to remove the Indians by force but merely gave the President the authority and money to negotiate treaties of removal with the tribes. Jackson's views were known, however, and pressure to negotiate treaties with the southern tribes began at once."⁷⁰ Using this act, on September 27, 1830, the Choctaw signed the Treaty of the Dancing Rabbit. By signing this treaty the tribe "ceded to the United States the entire country owned by them east of the Mississippi River and were given three years to move to the domain designated for them west of the Arkansas." The tribe sent an exploring party out to the new land escorted by twelve soldiers supplied by Col. Arbuckle at Cant. Gibson.⁷¹

The army now began to play its role in the removal process with the military posts being the focal points for the protection and assistance of the emigrating bands. By 1831 the entire 7th Infantry was stationed at Cant. Gibson. These troops, it was hoped, would be able to protect the new emigrants from the hostile Plains tribes.⁷² Unfortunately for the emigrants things would not get any better.

As mentioned previously, on February 6, 1832 the army ordered that all cantonments under their control would be designated "forts" therefore the designation Fort Gibson will be used from this point on.

During the entire period that Tillinghast was at West Point his name was kept on the rolls at Fort Gibson. From the date of his transfer to the Academy in May 1827 until late June 1830, he was recorded in the *Returns* from the Fort as "ordered to West Point – date 7 May 1827 for G.H. [General Headquarters] Post." In the *Returns* for June 1830, it was recorded "promoted to 1st Lieut., on duty at U.S. Academy, 4th February, 1830 – Gen. Orders."⁷³ *Cullum's Register* listed Tillinghast's last teaching date at West Point as October 14, 1834 followed by "and on frontier duty at Ft. Gibson, I.T., 1835-36."⁷⁴ From that date to January, 1835, Tillinghast was still listed in the *Returns* as being on duty at the Military Academy. First Lieut. Tillinghast was ordered to duty at Ft. Gibson in 1835 because he was needed there now that the entire 7th Infantry was at

⁶⁹ "René Edward de Russy", *Wikipedia*. Accessed 1/9/2016.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren%C3%A9_Edward_De_Russy

⁷⁰ Prucha, p. 256.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Returns*, June, 1830.

⁷⁴ "Nicholas Tillinghast, 374." *Cullum's Register*.

the post in order to deal with the huge increase in Indian emigration prompted by the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Another reason he was needed back at the fort was because sickness there had become epidemic and replacements for officers and men who were on sick leave or dead was a vital necessity. This will be discussed in more detail in the next, and last, section of this piece.

The *Returns* of January 1835 list Tillinghast as “1st Lieut. on furlo. (furlough), untill [sic] 1st Feb. 1835 to Adj. Gen. date 1st June, 1834.”⁷⁵ The *Returns* for February repeat this but the March *Returns* states “9th Oct. ’34 to Special Orders at A.G. office 13 of 1834.”⁷⁶ The April *Returns* repeats the above, but surprisingly the one for May 1835 records Nicholas as “absent without leave since 10th May 1835.”⁷⁷ The *Returns* for June repeats same but *Cullum’s Register*, records that Tillinghast was promoted to “Captain, 7th Infantry, June 1, 1835.”⁷⁸ In the July *Returns*, we see for the first time Tillinghast listed as “Captain – Co. G also on furlo. until 31st Oct. 35, Gov. off – date 1835 – Promotion from HQ gained by.”⁷⁹ Essentially the same entry continues in the *Returns* from August and September, 1835.⁸⁰

What can we make of these entries in the *Returns* from January 1835 to October 1835, a period of 10 months? Tillinghast is listed as being on furlough for most of this time. For the months of May and June, he is recorded as absent without leave even though we know he was promoted to Captain in June 1835. All this could be attributed to a communications failure between Army Headquarters and the Adjutant General’s Office and Fort Gibson. During this time we know that Captain Tillinghast had to travel from the east coast to Fort Gibson in order to report for duty at the post. Colonel Arbuckle, it seems, had only been informed about Tillinghast’s status in seven of the ten months in question. This may explain why he was listed on the fort’s records as being on furlough. It would be easy to conclude that the two “absent without leave” months of May and June were months that Tillinghast journeyed to the fort but that doesn’t explain him being recorded on furlough for the three months (July - September) prior to his being “reported for duty” on October, 1835. When we look at what happened between the day he reported for duty and the day he resigned his commission, would it have been possible that Tillinghast occupied part of his furlough trying to get his transfer back to the frontier and Fort Gibson repealed? While possible it would seem unlikely given army procedures at that time in history.

His Second, and Last, Tour of Duty on the Frontier

Now that he was back on the frontier, Captain Tillinghast found that the troops at Fort Gibson were extremely busy resettling immigrant tribes from the southeastern U.S. and settling disputes between them and original tribes under their purview.

Discounting the first group of Cherokees (Old Settlers) the second of the Five Civilized Tribes to emigrate were the Creek, who called themselves Muscogee. This included both peaceful tribal members and their more hostile brothers, many of these being very dejected. They had to be

⁷⁵ *Returns*, January, 1835.

⁷⁶ *Returns*, March, 1835.

⁷⁷ *Returns*, May, 1835.

⁷⁸ “Nicholas Tillinghast, 374.” *Cullum’s Register*.

⁷⁹ *Returns*, July, 1835.

⁸⁰ *Returns*, October, 1835.

handcuffed, chained and guarded by soldiers in order to move them to the lands assigned to them after signing a removal treaty. By 1836, 14,609 Creeks had been removed and resettled.⁸¹

The Creek were followed by the Chickasaw. When the government tried to settle this group with the Choctaw, they refused. Finally, after much negotiating, they were settled on land purchased from the Choctaw in 1837.⁸²

As these tribes settled they came into contact with the Osage, who by 1835 were an impoverished group. Driven by hunger because of the scarcity of game on their land the Osage began raiding the herds of the Creek and first Cherokee and also started to encroach on the hunting grounds of Plains tribes further to the west of them. Arbuckle, who had been promoted to Brigadier General and put in charge of the entire southwestern area, tried to remedy the condition of the Osage by concluding more treaties with them and their adversaries but it was to no avail. The frequency of their raids increased.⁸³

The main body of the Cherokee gave the government more problems than any other group at that time. Francis Paul Prucha notes,

Of the southern tribes, the Cherokees were the most advanced, the best organized, and (if one exempts the Seminoles) the most determined to resist removal. As they were the focal point of agitation that brought the removal policy into play with the Removal Act of 1830, so they furnished the most striking example of forced removal. Here the United States army – regulars and militia – played a significant role.⁸⁴

In 1831 the federal government, especially Secretary of War Cass, lost patience with the Cherokee. The tribe split into two factions. One, under sub-chief Major John Ridge, decided to support a removal treaty; the other faction, under John Ross, led the anti-removal diehards. The Ridge faction was in the minority but it negotiated a treaty of removal with the government at New Echota on December 29, 1835.⁸⁵ This would have been two months after Nicholas Tillinghast reported for duty at Fort Gibson. The Ridge faction began the move to Indian Territory while the Ross faction refused, some stating they would rather die than move. This ultimately led to the forcible removal by the U.S. Army and militia of this large majority faction of Cherokee during the late 1830s prompting the Indians to call the route they were forced to travel on the Trail of Tears. Not only would this group encounter hostile tribes like the Osage in their new homes, they would continue their conflict using all types of violence, even political assassination, to punish each other for their different actions concerning removal and resettlement.

The army at Fort Gibson also faced the problem of increasing numbers of non-Indian intruders. According to Agnew,

⁸¹ Prucha, p. 261.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Agnew, p. 142.

⁸⁴ Prucha, p. 262.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

Although intertribal strife would continue to disturb the tranquility of the eastern portion of Indian Territory, records at Fort Gibson suggest that by this time the army was being called upon increasingly to protect tribes from non-Indian interlopers. Arbuckle sent out frequent patrols to apprehend or expel white troublemakers and return runaway slaves. One of the officers at the post complained that armed commands were sent out almost daily to police the illicit whisky trade or to escort ‘villainous white people out of Indian country.’⁸⁶

Capt. Tillinghast, who commanded Company G, would have been directly involved in these policing activities, even though *Returns* from October 1835 to April 1836 do not specify it as so.

Slavery was another thorny issue that the army had to contend with. Historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, the author of *An Indigenous History of the United States*, states,

For most of the period from the U.S. War of Independence to the 1890s, the sole function of the U.S. military was to kill, round up refugees, relocate, and confine Native Americans and appropriate their land and resources to place Anglo settlers, particularly slave-owning planters involved in mono/cash crop production.⁸⁷

While this statement is in opposition to Brad Agnew’s earlier assertion that the troops at Fort Gibson “assisted Indians in resettlement and cushioned their culture shock,” it is in fact an interpretation of events during the same time period from an Indian perspective. Dunbar-Ortiz was the daughter of a tenant farmer and half-Indian mother who grew up in rural Oklahoma.⁸⁸ If we follow her train of thought we should look at slavery in the Indian Territory as it was introduced there in the 1830s and as it was between 1835 and 1836 when Nicholas Tillinghast was last stationed at Fort Gibson.

Slavery in the Indian Territory had its roots in the white plantations and in the plantations and farms of the Five Civilized Tribes in the southeastern states. As part of their decision to become “civilized” these tribes adopted black slavery in similar fashion to whites. The Creek, Seminole, and Cherokee also allowed a few hundred runaway slaves to reside with them as free people. As time went on they bought, sold and kept blacks as slaves. They were used as laborers, doing most of the manual work associated with the cash crop agriculture of the south especially cotton and surplus crops. On smaller farms slaves would work hand in hand with their masters in the field. The only tribe of the Five which didn’t enslave blacks in the commonly accepted way was the Seminole. Hundreds of slaves who escaped from whites and the Creek were harbored by them. The Seminole also seized slaves from both groups. The blacks were allowed to live and labor on their own as long as they provided an annual tribute of food to their tribal masters. Many of these blacks married tribe members.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Agnew, p. 143.

⁸⁷ Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne. “The Blind Spot of United States History”, *Beacon Broadside*. (October 12, 2015). Accessed 1/14/2016. <http://www.beaconbroadside.com/broadside/2015/10/the-blind-spot-of-united-states-history.html>

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Krauthamer, Barbara. “Slavery.” *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*. (Oklahoma Historical Society). Accessed 1/23/2016. <http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=SL003>

Intermarriage between blacks and Indians was handled differently by each tribe. The Choctaw and Chickasaw didn't allow it. Seminole and Creek had no aversion to it. The Cherokee, who owned more black slaves than any other tribe, discouraged intermarriage. Eventually all the tribes, except the Seminole, passed laws against intermarriage between blacks and tribal members. Even with anti-miscegenation laws marriages did take place. Usually, offspring from these unions were considered Africans by the Indians.

When the tribes were removed from their lands by the U.S. Government, their slaves "loaded wagons, cleared the roads and led teams of livestock along the way."⁹⁰ Generally, black slaves in the Five Tribes were not sold separately but kept together in family units. Indian slave owners did not, as a rule, use violence to control them and did not consider them sub-human beasts of burden. Even though the tribes adopted slave codes before and after they were removed to Indian Territory in the 1830s, slaves were usually allowed to worship together and could learn to read and write. In these ways their concept of black slavery differed from the average white's concept. It must be made clear, however, that "Although slaves did not have their lives characterized by brutality and exploitation, they nonetheless occupied a degraded status as unfree people in Indian Nations."⁹¹

It was not unusual for slaves to run away from their white and Indian masters in early Oklahoma, Arkansas and Texas. Captain Tillinghast and his army comrades would have had to aid white masters in their efforts to capture and return runaways. Indian masters, especially the Cherokee, had their own "police force" which would track down escaped slaves and free blacks later. The Cherokee had few free blacks living with them. The ones that they did have were related by blood through previous generations of union. The Cherokee Nation at that time was considered as separate from the United States with its own government. As such it became a sanctuary for runaway slaves from neighboring slave states. In the early years of their resettlement in Indian Territory, the tribe passed a law that dealt with runaway slaves that came into their land:

"RESOLVED by the National Committee and Council, that all free negroes coming into the Cherokee Nation, under any pretense whatsoever, shall be viewed and treated, in every respect, as intruders, and shall not be allowed to reside in the Cherokee Nation without a permit from the National Committee and Council."⁹²

Free blacks endured a precarious life in the Indian Territory as more whites moved into and around the area. Professional slave hunters or catchers increased and they cared little whether a black person was free or slave. They would capture free blacks and transport them to Arkansas and Texas thereby enslaving them for profit. When some members of the resettled tribes, especially Cherokees, realized that money could be made in this odious trade, they also rounded up free blacks. Most of the tribes tried to protect free blacks who were related to them by blood but if the individuals were strangers they were allowed to be taken away.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Davis, J.B. "Slavery in the Cherokee Nation." *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Volume 11, No.4, December 1933. p. 1064. Accessed 1/24/2016. <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Chronicles/v011/v011p1056.html>

The Western Cherokee's tribal government passed a series of laws concerning their slaves in the 1830s which made their lives worse. At the time this part of the tribe was living in Arkansas. While the army wasn't bound to enforce these laws, they had to respect them especially if they mirrored statutes in place in a slave state like Arkansas. A good example of one of these laws is as follows:

RESOLVED BY THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE AND COUNCIL IN
GENERAL COUNCIL CONVENED, That after the expiration of six months
from and after this date, no slave or slaves in the Cherokee Nation, shall have the
right or privilege to own any kind of property whatever, and therefore, all slaves
in the Cherokee Nation now owning any kind of property, and failing to comply
with this law, by not selling it off by the above mentioned time, shall thereby
forfeit their property to their owners, and the National Light-Horse are hereby
required to enforce and carry into effect this law in their respective districts.
Resolved Further, that if a slave or slaves are caught gambling or intoxicated, or if
they should in any way abuse a free person, he, she, or they (negroes) shall for
either of the above offenses, receive sixty lashes on the bare back for each and
every such offense to be inflicted by the Light-Horse.

Tahlonteeskee⁹³, Dec. 3, 1833

Approved:
JOHN JOLLY
BLACK COAT
W. WEBBER
Chiefs⁹⁴

So much for Indian-owned black slaves having the freedom to own land and live peacefully without brutality. How Tillinghast felt about all of this while back at Fort Gibson is not known.

We do know that in 1842, six years after Tillinghast left, twenty-five Cherokee slaves had had enough and they revolted. They "stole guns, horses, mules, ammunition, food and supplies" and attempted to flee from Indian Territory to Mexico, where slavery had been abolished."⁹⁵ On the way south they encountered a couple of slave hunters and killed them. These slaves were joined by at least ten other escapees from the Creek. The Cherokee sent their militia after them and seven miles from the Red River they were caught. After they were returned five slaves were executed and the rest were sent as slave workers on steamboats on the Mississippi. The incident was blamed on armed black Seminoles who were living nearby. The Cherokee Nation passed a law on December 2, 1842, ordering all free blacks, except former Cherokee slaves, to leave the Nation.⁹⁶

⁹³ Tahlonteeskee was the Old Settler capitol from 1828-1839

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Burton, Art. T. "Slave Revolt of 1842." *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*. (Oklahoma Historical Society). Accessed 1/23/2016. <http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=SL002>

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

If all of this wasn't enough for the army to deal with, a new crisis developed. Strained relations between American settlers in Texas and the central government of Mexico were reaching a breaking point. The Americans sought armed assistance from residents of the United States and the Mexicans actively wooed the Indians on both sides of the Red River.⁹⁷ Organized groups of armed Americans were traveling through the area under Gen. Arbuckle's control on their way to aid Texans. Mexicans at the same time were trying to incite Plains tribes, like the Comanche, to take action against these American adventurers. A month after Tillinghast arrived at Fort Gibson on November 24, 1835, Gen. Arbuckle warned the commanding officers of outlying posts such as Fort Jessup and Fort Towson that these bands of armed men must be turned back. The undermanned regulars sent to the border to stem this tide of volunteers for Texas Independence were not able to accomplish this and luckily the Plains tribes, including the powerful Comanche in Texas, rejected Mexican proposals of an alliance against the Americans.⁹⁸

“Turbulence spawned by the Texas Revolution, Indian removal, and dissident Plains tribes supported General Matthew Arbuckle's conviction that a significant military force at Fort Gibson was essential to the peace of Indian Territory. Officials in Arkansas, however, did not share the general's opinion. As the territory moved toward statehood, the legislature renewed its efforts to secure the relocation of troops from Fort Gibson to a point closer to the Arkansas border. In March, 1836, a memorial drafted by that body was referred to the Military Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives, which was already considering a comprehensive plan proposed by Secretary of War Lewis Cass to realign the military along the entire frontier from the Red River to Canada. Cass notified the chairman of the Military Affairs Committee that numerous complaints concerning the unhealthful site of Fort Gibson had persuaded him that it should be abandoned.”⁹⁹

Arbuckle argued that there was no position between Fort Gibson and the Arkansas boundary on the Arkansas River that would be any more healthful than Fort Gibson.¹⁰⁰

Captain Joseph A. Phillips, a friend of Tillinghast's at the Fort and commander of Company K, took issue with Arbuckle and took it upon himself to write to the House Committee on Military Affairs stating that the Fort should be abandoned for health reasons. In his letter he “charged that prolonged service at Fort Gibson had impaired the health of the troops and diminished the regiment's effectiveness as a military force.”¹⁰¹ This is in itself a very unusual action for a subordinate to engage in and under most circumstances would be considered insubordination. It didn't seem to have any negative effect on his military career, however. After much debate and a congressional inquiry it was decided not to abandon Fort Gibson. How Nicholas Tillinghast felt about this controversy or the health situation at the Fort is not known.

⁹⁷ Agnew, p. 151.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Specifically, what was the health situation at the Fort? Health problems at Fort Gibson started when the post was built and sickness, especially during the summer months, plagued the men stationed there. These problems were the result of the fort being located near swamps which were infested with mosquitoes that carried all kinds of parasitic diseases, especially malaria. *The U.S. Army's Office of Medical History* tells us,

Men from Fort Smith were among those who established Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, in the 1820s. The post was yet another where health problems were frequent and severe, but it could not easily be abandoned. It was a base from which important expeditions set out and to which came refugees, including Indian women and children seeking shelter from tribal warfare engendered by the federal government's removal policy. From 1824 through 1835, 561 enlisted men and 9 officers died at Fort Gibson, described by one surgeon as 'the charnel house of the Army.' More than half of the deaths occurred in 1834 and 1835 alone, years when the most dangerous form of malaria, remittent fever, was more prevalent than usual, and tuberculosis was also causing deaths. Although cholera did appear at the fort, it was probably not a major factor in the mortality rate; most of the patients at the post hospital seem to have been the victims of malarial fevers. The surgeons also cared for the victims of respiratory diseases, drunkenness, and harsh physical punishments [sic] meted out to enlisted men. So great was the rate of sickness and disability that in 1831 an addition was ordered for the log hospital that had been completed only four years earlier. The commanding officer, Colonel Arbuckle, apparently had little enthusiasm for the hospital addition, and its completion was long delayed.

Disease and the remedies used to combat it plagued the many expeditions that set out from Fort Gibson. Among the most unfortunate of these undertakings was the one led by Brig. Gen. Henry Leavenworth, who in the spring of 1834 joined dragoon units that had already arrived there from Jefferson Barracks. Assigned to the newly formed Regiment of Dragoons were a surgeon, Clement A. Finley who later served briefly as a surgeon general in the early months of the Civil War, and two assistant surgeons. The men under their care were already sickly, and at least one soldier blamed an unnamed medical attendant at the fort for their condition. It may have been this medical officer who had fallen into the habit of treating almost every complaint with calomel, his favorite mercurial remedy, without being careful of the dosage. Soldiers might come to him with a minor complaint, but, after repeated visits, the mercury would begin to take its toll. His patients would gradually decline, their countenances merging from a rosy hue of healthfulness into a shallow and ghastly likeness of disease, their firm step giving way to a totter of decrepitude; their strong arms shaking with nervous tremor; their bright eyes become sunken and dilated, and, in fact, through a cause of either willful neglect or gross malpractice, brought down within a short period of time from health, and buoyancy, and joyousness of youth, to a premature grave.¹⁰²

¹⁰² "Laying a Foundation," *U.S. Army Medical Department, Office of Medical History*, p. 48-49. Accessed 10/8/2015. http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/civil/gillett2/amedd_1818-1865_chpt2.html

A first-hand account of what the Fort was like when Capt. Tillinghast was there for his second tour of duty came from 1st Lieutenant William W. Mather, who we encountered earlier with his description of his journey to Fort Gibson from St. Louis: "I shall say nothing of this place until I know more of it... The mail arrives and departs weekly. Phillips and Tillinghast and Arden are here, and a great many that I know. Two officers have lately died and another is not expected to recover from fever contracted during the expedition in the prairies last summer."¹⁰³

Mather's next letter was dated January 13, 1836, when he had learned more about Fort Gibson. He wrote,

I have been constantly engrossed on duties connected with my company. I have the honor to command the worst company of the Seventh Regiment, so you may conceive the pleasure of my duties. The company's books, papers and accounts are in the most perfect confusion, and a long time will be required to put them in order. It has had no permanent commander for several years, and the necessary consequence has followed that the men are not ambitious, and are a ragged, dirty, drunken set of fellows. Forty-two men are crowded into a room about the size of my father's dining room and kitchen. The other companies are scarcely better accommodated [sic].... Fort Gibson is not an unpleasant place at this season of the year. There is a hoar frost nights, and warm, pleasant days like October in New England. The Fort, as it is called, is a picketed enclosure of 90 by 95 yards, with long blocks of log cabins within,.... The two squares on the corners represent block-houses for the purpose of defending the large square. There is a small village around of houses, stores, kitchens, hospital, tavern, mess-house, and the various buildings necessary for the various wants of such a community. The Neosho or Grand River flows about 100 yards from the Fort, and the water sometimes almost comes into it.

The ground gradually ascends to the northeast one-half mile, where the country opens as a prairie several miles in extent. East, southwest and northwest is an extensive low ground filled with stagnant, putrid lagoons in the lower parts, and a large part of the remainder is a canebrake, most of which is impenetrable on account of the size of the canes, which stand like stalks in a wheat field and 20 feet high.

There are several New England ladies here and they enjoy pretty good health, but expect a regular fever every summer. Among the men at this Fort about 400, there are almost 12 to 14 hundred cases of sickness reported by the surgeon annually, but most of it is to be attributed to the irregular habits of the men and the trips on the prairies. Few officers or men return from those trips without a broken constitution, and they are considered almost as a death warrant by most of the men. Tillinghast and Phillips are here and are my next door neighbors. We live in three contiguous rooms, and one waiter serves us all. We are together most of the

¹⁰³ Letter dated December 22, 1835, as cited in Foreman, Carolyn Thomas. "Reports from Fort Gibson." *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 31(2), 1953. p. 206. Accessed 12/19/2015. <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Chronicles/v031/v031p205.pdf> .

timeBut for Tillinghast and Phillips, who are like brothers, I should be very lonely when not occupied with my duties.... I should not like to have a family here. The place is the charnel house of the Army. More deaths occur here annually than in the whole of the rest of the Army, as it is said.

I am willing to run any risk as long as I can serve my country, and no consideration of personal safety shall weigh, where I think my services can be useful.... I have fortunately come here at the right season to become acclimated without injury. I enjoy perfect health and hope by care and temperance in everything to continue to be blessed with it.¹⁰⁴

After reading Mather's letters it doesn't seem like a stretch of the imagination to come to the conclusion that Tillinghast felt the same way about many of the points he made about Fort Gibson. We know how Phillips felt because of his letter which was highlighted in the previous section. This would be reasonable because of the closeness of these three. Surely they must have discussed the problems at the Fort when together.

Some of the points Mather made are intriguing and deserve a bit more attention. For example, he states that his company "has had no permanent commander for several years." The *Returns* for that time record the Company D commander, Capt. P.R. Stephenson, as being away with the Indians under (S.O.) since 1830. This may mean that he was away from the Fort on Special Orders (S.O.) and was dealing directly with a tribe or tribes somewhere else but was kept on the regiment's books as was Tillinghast when he was at West Point.

Mather also mentions a Lt. Arden in his first letter. He was Thomas Boyle Arden from New York and a graduate of the Academy in the Class of 1835.¹⁰⁵ He also may have been a student of Tillinghast's in the last year he was teaching at West Point. Like Tillinghast he was ordered to Fort Gibson directly upon graduation probably because of the need to replace officers due to resignations, sickness and even death.

Mather went on to write, "The place is the charnel house of the Army." This is a verbatim quote from one of the post's surgeons previously included here in a paragraph from the *U.S. Army's Office of Medical History*. There isn't any doubt that this statement was repeated on more than one occasion by the officers and men stationed at the Fort. This is also true of the sentence "More deaths occur here annually than in the whole of the rest of the army."

The last paragraph in the second letter probably expresses the attitude that most young patriotic officers from the Academy had concerning doing their duty in the army. Whether Tillinghast still retained this positive type of attitude during this, his second tour of duty at "the charnel house of the army," is doubtful. Mather's outlook was also to change in due course. At this point it is

¹⁰⁴ Letter dated January 13, 1836, as cited in Foreman, Carolyn Thomas. "Reports from Fort Gibson." *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 31(2), 1953. pp. 206-207. Accessed 12/19/2015.

<http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Chronicles/v031/v031p205.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵ Foreman, Carolyn Thomas. "Reports from Fort Gibson." *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 31(2), 1953. p. 206, footnote #4a. Accessed 12/19/2015. <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Chronicles/v031/v031p205.pdf>.

obvious that Mather considered temperance to be a major factor in retaining good health at this place of sickness. Did Tillinghast feel the same?

By May 1836, things began to decline for Tillinghast. The *Returns* for that month tells us that he was recorded as “‘sick’ at Ft. Gibson, date May 1836.” Whether sick in quotation marks meant that he was not physically ill or he just reported sick to the surgeon is not explained. We do know that for the preceding months he was on his own running Company G. No 1st Lieutenant or 2nd Lieutenant is recorded as being on duty with his company. This may have created considerable stress causing him to be psychologically and spiritually beaten. For the months of June, July and August he is recorded in the *Returns* as “on leave of absence until 31st Dec. ’36 order No. 26 – 30 April ’36.” On the *Returns* dated Sept. 1836, at the bottom of the very first column, is written “Resigned” over “as of Oct. – N. Tillinghast–31st July 1836.” Also under the above and recorded under “Resigned” is “W.W. Mather, Aug. 1836.”¹⁰⁶

It seems likely that the difficulties he faced with increased Indian resettlement, the conflicts between tribes, the problems with white intruders, the slavery situation, the condition of the Fort, sickness, drunkenness and lack of adequate personnel including officers, had finally weakened Nicholas Tillinghast physically and mentally. His friend Richard Edwards, who had a different rationale, summarized what he thought brought about the end of Tillinghast’s military career in his Alumni Day speech at Bridgewater.

We doubt not that Mr. Tillinghast, while an officer in the army, discharged his duty faithfully, and to the satisfaction of his superiors. But his tastes and feelings were ill-adapted to that mode of life. He found good and noble men among the officers with whom he served, and with whom he was associated, but we think we may say with truth that his experience of military life deepened in his mind the dislike for war and all of its paraphernalia.

He was emphatically a man of peace, in feeling and in principle. We refrain from attempting to state his views on this point with any degree of minuteness, for we are not aware that he ever took pains to make them known in detail; but that he had a strong repugnance to the soldier’s life, and also to the deciding of national differences by an appeal to arms – that in short, he was opposed to the whole institution of war, is a fact that will be abundantly borne out by all who were familiar with him during the latter part of his life.

Especially was it true that he had very little respect for the holiday parades of our ‘citizen soldiery.’ And yet, he was by no means insensible to the good qualities of those engaged in the profession of arms. He was keenly alive to the sense of honor which prevails among army officers.¹⁰⁷

It may be that when all was said and done Nicholas Tillinghast decided not to be ministered unto but to minister.

¹⁰⁶ *Returns*, June, July, August, September, 1836.

¹⁰⁷ Wilson, David. “Richard Edwards, class of 1845, Bridgewater State Normal School.”

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M.J. Hughes '65
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