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## WAR DEPARTMENT AND INDIAN AFFAIRS, 1800-1824

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From 1789 until the Bureau of Indian Affairs was established in 1824, Indian affairs were under the direct control of the Secretary of War. This collection consists of the letters received by and letters sent to the War Department, including correspondence from Indian superintendents and agents, factors of trading posts, Territorial and State governors, military commanders, Indians, missionaries, treaty and other commissioners, Treasury Department officials, and persons having commercial dealings with the War Department, and other public and private individuals. In addition, attachments include vouchers, receipts, requisitions, abstracts and financial statements, certificates of deposit, depositions, contracts, newspapers, copies of speeches to Indians, proceedings of conferences with Indians in Washington, licenses of traders, passports for travel in the Indian country, appointments, and instructions to commissioners, superintendents, agents, and other officials.

**Date Range:** 1800-1824

**Content:** 7,588 images

**Source Library:** U.S. National Archives

### **Detailed Description:**

From 1789 until the Bureau of Indian Affairs was established in 1824, Indian affairs were under the direct control of the Secretary of war, except for a government-operated factory system of trade with the Indians begun in 1795.

A fire in the War Department on November 8, 1800, destroyed most of its records; therefore, the records of the Office of the Secretary of War during the period of its direct administration of Indian affairs exist only from late 1800 until 1824. During this period the War Department kept most of its incoming correspondence in one series controlled by registers. Copies of outgoing letters were recorded in several sets of letter books, one of which was for Indian affairs.

This Archives Unbound collection consists of the letters received by and letters sent to the War Department. The letters received consist of correspondence from Indian superintendents

and agents, factors of trading posts, Territorial and State governors, military commanders, Indians, missionaries, and other public and private individuals. Among them are drafts of letters sent, vouchers, receipts, requisitions, abstracts and financial statements, certificates of deposit, depositions, contracts, and newspapers. The letters sent have a higher proportion of letters to such addressees as the Superintendent of Indian Trade, treaty and other commissioners, Treasury Department officials, and persons having commercial dealings with the War Department. Some of the letters were signed by clerks in the Department or by the President rather than the Secretary of War. Included are copies of speeches to Indians, proceedings of conferences with Indians in Washington, licenses of traders, passports for travel in the Indian country, appointments, and instructions to commissioners, superintendents, agents, and other officials.

During this period the War Department was most concerned with the Seneca and other Indians in new York and the Indians in the South, particularly the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Creek. Also important were the Indians of the Old Northwest, and there was a growing interest in the Indians west of the Mississippi River, especially the Osage and the Caddo, and other Indians living in Louisiana.

The correspondence, particularly the letters sent, relates to a broad range of subjects. It was a period of active treaty-making, except for the years 1810-1814, when there were wars with the northwestern Indians, led by Tecumseh, and the Creek Indians and the War of 1812. In the correspondence there is much discussion of the establishment and maintenance of peace and friendship with the Indians, but there is more about land matters, particularly cessions. After the War of 1812, the proposed removal of Indians to west of the Mississippi River became a common topic. Other land related subjects are roads across Indian lands; land reserves for individual Indians, first provided by the treaty of November 16, 1805, with the Choctaw Indians; and boundaries and surveys. There are complaints from Indians about violations of terms of treaties. There is correspondence about the purchase and distribution of annuity goods, including numerous complaints of late deliveries. Even at this early date, there was considerable discussion of educating and "civilizing" Indians, usually in the "useful arts": raising crops and livestock, smithery and carpentry, and sewing, spinning and weaving. There are also letters about mission schools and the use of the Civilization Fund, established in 1819, to support such schools, and about missionaries allowed to reside on Indian lands to spread the Christian religion. Other subjects are the Office of Indian Trade and the government factories; private trade, with frequent mention of the legislation regulating trade and intercourse with the Indians; the sale of liquor to Indians; the issuance of passports; intruders and settlers on Indian lands; houses of entertainment; murders; horse stealing and other depredations committed by and against Indians; stolen children; slaves held by Indians; visits of Indian delegations to Washington and the discouragement of them; disputes between tribes and states; intertribal relations and the refusal of the U.S to intervene; the establishment, location, transfer, and discontinuance of superintendencies and agencies and instructions for their operation; the appointment and conduct of officials and complaints

and charges against them; agency buildings; the investment of Indian funds; and estimates, allocations of funds, accounts, and other financial matters.