

1865: U.S. Army troops come to the Verde Valley



By Glenda Farley

Originally Published: August 17, 2022 midnight

Beginning in 1865, the civilian economy of the Verde Valley was based on supplying the needs of the military through contracts and employment of individuals for freighting and other services. The Sutler Store provided for the needs of both military and civilians residents.

The United States established a military presence at Fort Whipple and then extended it into the Verde Valley. First Lieutenant Antonio Abeytia led 18 enlisted men of Company K, 1st Cavalry, New Mexico Volunteers and Dr. Palmer from Fort Whipple over the Black Hills, arriving at the Settlement (with about 22 residents) near Clear Creek on Aug. 27, 1865. Their temporary post was named Camp Lincoln on December 20, 1865. The camp was moved northward to a rocky hill above the confluence of the Verde River and Beaver Creek, and was occupied during January by Company E, 4th Infantry, California Volunteers. Wales Arnold and George D. Bowers were appointed to be the sutlers of Camp Lincoln. (Arizona Miner; Jan. 4, 11, 1868.)

Soldiers received only the basics for survival from the military and the sutler, a civilian merchant, sold what soldiers wanted; soap, crackers, cake, candy, cigars and tobacco, lemonade, paper and envelopes, etc. The sutler sold his merchandise from a tent or wagon that could be moved as the army traveled or from a more permanent place at a military post or fort.

The Camp Lincoln name was changed to Camp Verde on Nov. 23, 1868, (and did not become Fort Verde until April 5, 1879). Plans were made to move the military post southward and construction work on new buildings surrounding a central parade ground had been done during 1871.

The new post was occupied on April 25, 1872. A new adobe Sutler Store was constructed near the military post under the direction of sutler Hugo Richards. The Camp Verde Post Office was established there for the civilian population (about 174 in 1870) on March 14, 1873, with store clerk, George W. Hance, as the postmaster. Later, when Hugo Richards was appointed to be sutler at Fort Whipple, he sold the adobe Sutler Store to William S. Head, who then became postmaster.

The Military Department of Arizona advertised their need to purchase supplies in newspapers and received proposals or bids from civilians. Native Americans had been paid to cut wood and harvest corn or other crops in connection with these contracts. To complete his hay contract during 1874, C. C. Bean hired 150 to 200 Native Americans to cut and haul hay to the post in great quantities at the rate of \$15 a ton. (Az. Weekly Miner, Feb. 6, May 15, 1874.) The Verde Valley labor force was seriously diminished when 1,476 Native Americans left their homes to go to San Carlos on February 27, 1875.

The following month, the Military Department of Arizona requested proposals to supply fuel (wood) forage, straw, etc., through the Chief Quartermaster's Office at Prescott. Contracts for the 1875-1876 fiscal year were announced during May. For Camp Verde, George Hance was awarded a contract to supply hay at \$28.30 a ton and wood at \$4.37+ a cord. (Az Weekly Miner; Mar. 12, May 7, 1875.)

George Hance entered into an Agreement with "Boss" William S. Head, of C. P. Head & Co., of Prescott, whereby men working to provide hay and wood for these contracts could receive payment by making "draws" in merchandise at the Sutler Store in Camp Verde. When George Hance received government checks, he deposited them at the store. Thus, C. P. Head & Co. functioned as a bank. Daily Record Books from the Sutler Store, under the heading "Hay & Wood," indicate most "draws" were for food items, clothing, and occasionally for tools. The amount of merchandise taken by George and John Hance, Mr. Morales and Mr. Baca during July indicates that a small crew of men were cutting wood and harvesting hay.

Exciting news was contained in a letter sent to Prescott from the Little Colorado on July 10, 1875. An old settler wrote that "there were en route between Wingate and Verde 10 wagons and 6 families. Between Pueblo and Santa Fe there were 25 wagons with machinery for mining purposes and agricultural implements, besides numerous other wagons with families scattered along the road. ... The emigrants have a great deal of dread of the road between Stoneman's Lake and Beaver Creek, and well they may, for a

worse piece of road would be hard to find in the Territory.” The letter appeared in the Arizona Weekly Miner on July 23, 1875.

A large group of people had gathered near Humansville, Missouri, to begin their journey to the Verde Valley where the 800-square-mile reservation had been revoked, annulled, and opened for settlement by presidential order on April 23, 1875. The main group, led by Preston W. Burford, started west on April 26, 1875. Because there were so many wagons, apparently the families with James O. Bristow pulled ahead, arriving in the Verde Valley in 3 months, 20 days. After a disagreement in New Mexico, William Hawkins, who had some knowledge of the route, led the Hawkins and “Parson” Bristow families with their livestock along the northern route used by the mail carriers, arriving at the Verde River on August 17. People in the main group traveled the southern route and ran out of provisions. P. W. Burford and Charley Dickinson took a pack horse down to the Sutler Store and returned 4 days later with food. They arrived at Beaver Creek on August 23. The Gaddis and Lett families had rested near the Colorado River, then joined a wagon train from Arkansas and arrived on Dry Beaver (McGuireville) on August 28, 1875.

“Parson” James Clawson Bristow (age 41, who arrived with his wife, 6 children and his son-in-law) wrote: “The Hance brothers had a contract to furnish the Post at Camp Verde with hay, so I took a sub-contract from them to cut hay in the hayfield with hoes at \$9.00 a ton. So we moved to [what would become] the Wilbur place. We moved there to be near the work. Jim [Human](#) and I cut \$100 worth of hay. There were a good many Mexicans cutting at the same time, while we were cutting hay.”

The daughter of James Oliver Bristow wrote: “Arriving at our destination, my father worked at hauling hay for the government with an ox team. The hay was cut with heavy hoes and raked with a hand rake.” James Oliver Bristow (age 50, who arrived with his wife and 9 children) may have been paid for cutting hay, but because he was frequently at the Sutler Store, he was probably paid for hauling hay in a wagon to Camp Verde and was probably picking up merchandise for others cutting hay. Written in the Daily Record Book on August 28, under the heading of “Hay & Wood,” J. O. Bristow received axle grease, and groceries for \$7.75. August 30, he received 100# flour \$9.00, and soap. August 31, he got 100# flour and baking soda \$1.00.

The Sutler Store, the economic and social hub of the Verde Valley, was located on the Camp Verde Military Reservation. Although there was a hotel, restaurant, and stage stop across the street, travel on or across the reserve was monitored. The new settlers who had been sympathetic to the Union and ex-soldiers were welcome and accepted. The store was a cash-and-carry business and only the names of people who had charge accounts has been preserved.

On Aug. 28, "Davidson" charged 50# corn meal \$4.50 on the "Hay & Wood" account. This was probably James G. Davidson (age 46, who arrived with his wife and 6 children) who had served in the Union Army with the 15th Missouri Regiment.

On August 31, the "Hay and Wood" account included J. O. Bristow, 100# flour and baking soda and Mr. "Buffer," 100# flour. This is probably Preston W. Buford (age 41, who arrived with his wife and 5 children) who had served in the Union Army, Company B, 26th Missouri Militia. He soon was using his wagon and team to haul freight to and from Prescott.

George Hance received payment for part of his contract on September 4. The hay voucher for \$4,483.17 and the wood voucher for \$437.50 were both deposited for credit at the Sutler Store. "Hay & Wood" charges included J.O. Bristow, coffee and sugar, \$1.00 each and J. Davidson, boots \$10, paper and stamps \$.50, and tobacco \$1.50.

Money earned from military contracts and employment during 1875 helped the new settlers become established as self-sufficient farmers and ranchers. They soon joined the "old-timers" who had been trading in their corn and grain crops, vegetables, melons, grapes, eggs, butter, beef and beer for groceries, coffee, tobacco, clothing and cash at the Sutler Store.

See: "Pioneer Stories of Arizona's Verde Valley" and other books detailing family histories.

("A Sketch of the History of My Traveling from Southwest Missouri to Arizona; James C. Bristow, October 5, 1909; and Sutler Store "Daily Record Books;" courtesy of Shane Murphy.)