

Capt. Richard Bache (- 7 Jan 1836)

Bache. At the U.S. Arsenal in this city on Wednesday morning, Jan. 13, Capt. Richard Bache of the U.S. Army. His friends and acquaintances and the officers of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps are invited to attend his funeral from the U.S. Arsenal on Friday at 12 o'clock.

Phyllis I. McClellan, Silent Sentinel on the Potomac, Fort McNair, 1791-1991, Heritage Books Inc., 1993, pp. 24-25.

Captain Richard Bache took command [of the Arsenal] in October 1833 and started making new block-tail gun carriages. The arsenal was to complete one per month, and to devise a method of preconstruction of components parts. He was also given \$2,800 to construct new soldiers' barracks by dismantling the wall of the old magazine at Little Falls, and to cancel the plan for piazzas on the tenement barracks since it darkened the rooms. In June he was instructed to furnish members of Congress with a carbine, bullet mold, and priming box upon request, requiring only their signature. Congressional "perks" existed even then.

In August, Bache was given \$400 to repair the wharf, and ordered to postpone the procurement of a crane until the next year. He was directed to forward a plan and estimate for construction of a building to house quarter-sized models of ordnance and attending pieces of equipment (now Building #21).

An 1823 Plat of Washington Arsenal shows the line of the proposed Washington Canal by which L'Enfant proposed to link the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal with the Anacostia River. From the route via Tiber creekbed in front of the capitol, James Creek Canal was to run from Virginia Avenue, along Canal Street, and empty into the Anacostia by the arsenal. Canal construction practically bankrupted the city by 1841, and James Creek was left as a stinking little rivulet.

In February 1835, President Van Buren and Secretary of War Cass visited the arsenal for a demonstration determining the effectiveness of cast iron gun carriages. This same year, Captain Bache was given funds to make wharf repairs, buy a boat and a crane, and floor the gun houses with brick. Mr. St. John was hired as a master workman at \$2.30 per day to put in lab shops and train men to use the tools, forms, and machines making all kinds of military pyrotechnics.

One of the best descriptions of the military installation at this time is in a letter dated September 25, 1835:

"The officers' quarters consist of two blocks, each containing three rooms with fireplaces, two rooms without fireplaces, and a kitchen, making in all six rooms with fireplaces, four without and two kitchens. Captain Bache occupies one block, and Lieut. Scott the other.

The barracks, or quarters for the enlisted men consist of two blocks, each containing four rooms and two kitchens. Four of these rooms are 18 x 20 feet, four 16 feet square. The kitchens are commodious. One other block containing eight rooms and four kitchens [have] rooms about 16 x 18 feet - the kitchens are the same size.

These are all the buildings designated for barracks, but there is a large room ultimately intended for a model room which is temporarily used as quarters. The barracks are disposed of between Major Mason's Company and the 29 enlisted men of the Ordnance Department, 14 of whom have families.

With respect to the officer quarters there is not the same abundance. The want of kitchens would render a portion of the rooms described unavailing -- indeed, I do not perceive how...either of the blocks could be occupied by more than one officer entitled to a separate kitchen. The necessity will therefore result of providing quarters elsewhere for some of the officers."

Military morale was low, 117 officers resigned their army commissions due to poor pay, lack of respect, no retirement plan, and hopeless prospects for promotion. Western posts were real hardship tours with inadequate quarters and uncertain replenishment of supplies--which forced units to live off the land. Disease killed far more men than enemy action.

First Lieutenant John Benjamin Scott assumed command of the arsenal in January 1836 when Captain Bache died.