

John Aaron Rawlins (13 Feb 1831 – 7 Sep 1869)

The Evening Star, Monday, September 6, 1869

Secretary Rawlins, His Critical Condition

No Hopes of His Recovery: He is Baptized and Makes His Will

The President Coming

The Feeling in Washington

Sketch of The Secretary's Life



No event has called forth so many expressions of regret and sympathy from the citizens of Washington for years as the dangerous illness of General John A. Rawlins, Secretary of War. His patriotism, courage, strict integrity, earnest devotion to his duties, and uniform courtesy and gentleness have won for him the highest respect and esteem of his associates in military and civil life, and the love of the people in all stations.

A few days ago Secretary Rawlins was removed from his rooms on F street opposite the Ebbitt House, to the residence of General Giles A. Smith, one of his old companions in arms, Second Assistant Postmaster General, No. 6 Grant Place. Here he has had every attention. His physicians, Dr. D.W. Bliss, Surgeon General Barnes, and Professor Tyler, have been constant in their attendance while Drs. Norris and Cady, in addition, were present yesterday. Among those with the Secretary yesterday and last night were Senator Morton; General J.E. Smith, General O.O. Howard, Quartermaster; General Meigs, Adjutant; General Townsend, General Eaton, General Ekin, General

Parker, of the Indian Bureau, General Dent, and Colonel J.W. Forney.

Notwithstanding the feeble condition of the Secretary yesterday morning, he signified his desire to make his last will and dictating the same to Colonel Parker, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, his confidential friend and companion, in the afternoon, at his request, Rev. Mr. Wilson, of McKendree M.E. Chapel, was sent for, who passed some time with him, during which the Sacrament of Baptism and of the Lord's Supper was administered.

During yesterday General Rawlins had a very interesting conversation with the Postmaster General, in which, with great clearness, he set forth his views on reconstruction and the condition of the Union men of the South, and the struggling people of Cuba. He spoke with great solemnity, and impressed all who heard him with profound sincerity. During his illness he has been visited regularly by all the members of the Cabinet in Washington, namely: Secretaries Robeson, Fish, Cox, and Cresswell.

In reply to a dispatch from the Secretary of the Navy, at 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon, informing President Grant of the dangerous condition of General Rawlins, the President telegraphed as follows: Saratoga, Sept. 5 -- Tell Secretary Rawlins I leave here within an hour for Washington. U.S. Grant. The next dispatch from Saratoga reads as follows:

Saratoga, Sept. 5 -- The President left here on the 5:50 train this afternoon, for Washington. He was to have left tomorrow, with his family, for Utica, to visit Hon. Roscoe Conkling, but the character of dispatches received today from Washington induced the President to write the following letter:

Hon. Roscoe Conkling -- My Dear Sir: It is with extreme regret that the continued and dangerous illness of Secretary Rawlins whose relations have been so intimate with me since the breaking out of the rebellion to the present day, compels me to forego the contemplated pleasure of a visit to your city tomorrow. I know that you and my other friends will appreciate the motive which calls me from a pleasure trip to the bedside of a comrade who has rendered such signal service to his country, and whose death will cast a gloom over the nation. The most recent dispatches scarcely have a hope that I may see him alive. I am, very sincerely yours. U.S. Grant.

The President left Saratoga yesterday afternoon with his family and arrived in New York on the evening train, when he proceeded to the residence of Mr. Corbin, where he left his family. He left New York for Washington on the train this morning and will reach here this evening at 5:15.

Secretary Rawlins gradually failed during the night and continued to grow weaker during the morning. At ten o'clock today he was perfectly conscious, but seemed to be growing dull and his physicians were fearful that his brain would soon become affected. His pulse ranged from 110 to 115 and he appears to be suffering more this morning than heretofore. The little nourishment which he is able to take, consisting of chicken broth, seems to have no effect. He has given up all hope of life, and is perfectly resigned. A coughing spell at intervals of about half an hour, arouses him for a short time, after which he sinks back and remains perfectly quiet. It is the opinion of his physicians that he may linger in this condition until tonight, though a sudden congestion of the lungs may take him off at any time. Dispatches are sent to Mrs. Rawlins at Danbury, Connecticut, every half hour, giving her an account of his condition. Secretaries Robeson and Cox, Postmaster General Cresswell, Gen. Sherman, Gen. Meigs, Sen. Swayne and Gen. Boarman were at the bedside of Secretary Rawlins today with his physicians, Surgeon General Barnes, Dr. Bliss and Dr. Cady.

Secretary Rawlings was born at Gilford in Davies county, Ill. on the 12th of February, 1831, and was a prominent member of the legal profession in that State until he entered the army in 1861, at which time he was very healthy, but in 1863 he contracted a severe cold from exposure in the field which brought on consumption, and since that time he has suffered frequently from hemorrhages. A few months since his physicians changed the manner of treatment to the inhalation of remedies, upon which he rapidly improved and in a few months gained several pounds of flesh. His diet consisted principally of raw beef and milk from which he derived much benefit. Enjoying better health for the past six months than for several years before until his return from his recent visit to his family in Danbury, Conn., when the excitement occasioned by travelling produced another hemorrhage, since which he has been rapidly sinking. His father and mother are both living at Galena, Ill. Mrs. Rawlins, his second wife, and the two children by his first wife are at Danbury, Conn. Mrs. R., who was confined several weeks ago, is too feeble to move, and what adds to her distress is the death of her infant a few days ago.

Secretary Rawlins, in politics, was formerly a Democrat, and was active in the support of the principles of that party, adhering to Mr. Douglas as their exponent, and was the candidate for Presidential Elector from the First Congressional District of Illinois on the Douglas ticket in 1860, and canvassed his district in its support, holding joint discussions in each county with the Republican candidate for Presidential Elector, Judge Allen C. Fuller. His party and personal friends awarded to him much credit for ability in these discussions. When the war came, which he had tried to avert, he promptly took his stand on the side of the Union, believing it to be the duty of every American citizen to support his country and to maintain in authority its constitutionally elected Executive, even to the laying down of his life, if need be; and with all his ability and influence he sought to make this the generally received view of others, especially of his own party, many of whom were timid about taking sides. A few nights after the firing on Sumter, a meeting of the citizens of Galena was held, and a prominent

Democrat was called to the chair. He had begun to talk about "Republican responsibility for the war" and "compromises" when Hon. E.B. Washburne rebuked him by exclaiming, "Mr. Chairman, any man who will try to stir party prejudices at this time is a traitor." At the same moment Rawlins entered the hall, and loud cries called him to the stand. He advanced and made a speech lasting half an hour, ending with these words: "I have been a Democrat all my life; but this is no longer a question of politics. It is simply country or no country. I have favored every honorable compromise; but the day of compromise is passed. Only one course is left us. We will stand by the flag of our country and appeal to the god of battles."

A few evenings afterward Rawlins and Grant met at another war meeting, and Rawlins jestingly proposed to Grant that they should get up a company. "As you have seen service you shall be captain," he said; "and Rowley and I will toss up to see which shall be first lieutenant." On receipt of the news of the first Bull Run disaster, he commenced in conjunction with John F Smith (subsequently brevet major general volunteers) and J.A. Maliby to raise the Forty-fifth or "Lead-mine regiment," Illinois infantry volunteers; when in August he received from General Grant, with whom he had been acquainted from the time of his settling in Galena, and for whose house in that place he was the attorney), without having sought it, the tender of a position on his staff, which he accepted. The dangerous illness of Mrs. Rawlins (who had been long a sufferer from consumption, and was then at her father's Mr. Hiram Smith, at Goshen, New York) called him East, where he remained by her side until her decease, August 30th. With the severe personal affliction resting upon him he made arrangements for the care of the three children that she left -- a son and two daughters -- the eldest of whom was in his fifth year, and joined Gen. Grant on the 15th of September, at Cairo, Ill., as his assistant adjutant general, with the rank of captain, having been appointed such the 30th of the preceding month, and was with him from that time, in all his battles and campaigns and military operations in the field, until the surrender of the army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House, Va., except about two months -- from the 31st of July, 1864 to the 1st of October following -- he was absent for the treatment of a severe bronchial affection he had contracted in the service.

The relations between General Grant and General Rawlins, personally and officially, were always of the most intimate, friendly, and confidential character. He was commissioned major and assistant adjutant general, to rank from the date of the surrender of Fort Donelson; was assigned in orders as assistant adjutant general and chief of staff, with the rank of lieutenant colonel, November 1, 1862; was appointed a brigadier general of volunteers, to rank from August 11, 1863; breveted major general of volunteers to rank from February 24, 1865, March 3, 1865, he was appointed chief of staff to the lieutenant general commanding, with the rank of brigadier general in the United States army; and was subsequently breveted major general United States army, to rank from March 13, 1865. In 1865, Congress created the title of general, which was bestowed on Lieutenant General Grant; at the same time General Rawlins was designated as chief of staff to the general commanding the armies.

The following letters show in some degree the high opinion Gen. Grant had of his Chief of Staff.

Headquarters Department of Tennessee, Vicksburg, Miss., July 21, 1863 -- Brigadier General L Thomas, Adjutant General of the Army -- General: I would respectfully recommend for gallant and meritorious services, and for extreme fitness for command corresponding to the increased rank the following promotions, to wit:

Here follows the list of officers recommended for promotion, including Lieutenant Colonel Rawlins. He then adds:

Lieutenant Colonel John A Rawlins has been my Assistant Adjutant General from the beginning of the rebellion. No officer has now a more honorable reputation than he has; and I think I can safely say that he would make a good corps commander. This promotion I would particularly ask as a reward of merit.

I am, General, very respectfully your obedient servant. U.S. Grant, Major General

Washington, D.C., April 4, 1864 -- Hon. Henry Wilson, Chairman Committee on Military Affairs --

Sir: I would most respectfully but earnestly ask for the confirmation of Brigadier General John A. Rawlins by your honorable body. General Rawlins has served with me from the beginning of the rebellion. I know he has most richly earned his present position. He comes the nearest being indispensable to me of any officer in the service; but if his confirmation is dependent on his commanding troops, he shall command troops at once. There is no department commander near where he has served that would not most gladly give him the very largest and most responsible command his rank would entitle him to. Believing a short letter on this subject more acceptable than a long one, I will only add that it is my earnest desire that General Rawlins should be confirmed; that if he fails, besides the loss it will be to the service and to me personally, I shall feel that by keeping with me a valuable officer because he made himself valuable, I have worked him an injury. With great respect, your obedient servant, U.S. Grant, Lieut. Gen., U.S.A.

Headquarters Armies of the United States, City Point, Va., February 23, 1865 --

Dear Washburne: Enclosed I send you a letter just received from Colonel Duff, late of my staff. I should be delighted if an act should pass Congress giving the Commander of the army a chief of staff, with the rank of Brigadier General in the regular army. It is necessary to have such an officer, and I see no reason why the law should not give it. It would also reward an officer who has won more deserved reputation in this war than any other who has acted throughout purely as a staff officer. I write to you instead of Duff, knowing your present friendship for Rawlins, as well as myself, and because you are in a place to help the thing along, if you think well of it. U.S. Grant, Lieutenant General, U.S.A.

At the close of the war General Rawlins remained upon the staff of General Grant as chief, and upon the inauguration of General Grant as President, General Rawlins was nominated for Secretary of War and immediately confirmed. He at once entered upon the discharge of his duties, relieving Genl. Schofield. As Secretary of War he soon won the confidence and esteem of all having business with the department. He was an indefatigable worker, constantly at his post and ever zealous in the faithful discharge of his duties. Being thoroughly acquainted with the reconstruction laws, and having a practical knowledge of the requirements and conditions of the people of the South, he has worked hard to assist the President in carrying into effect the provisions of the Congressional enactment's looking to the restoration of the southern States to the Union. With this experience he devoted himself earnestly to the work of reconstruction, and constantly urged the conciliatory policy recommended in General Grant's letters and official communications at the close of the campaign.

Later -- 3 p.m. -- Secretary Rawlins is still sinking, and his physicians think that he cannot live much longer. He is still conscious and during the day has frequently inquired if the President had arrived. Secretary Cox, Secretary Robeson, Postmaster General Cresswell, General Parker, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Surgeon General Barnes, General O.O. Howard, and General Swayne have been at his bedside during the day and a very large number of friends have called to inquire as to his condition.

The Evening Star, Thursday, September 9, 1869

Funeral of John A. Rawlins

An Imposing Pageant

Respect to the Illustrious Dead

The City in Morning

Scenes at the War Department

Arrival of Mrs. Rawlins
The Religious Services
The Funeral Cortege
Ceremonies at the Congressional Cemetery
Scenes and Incidents

This being the day appointed for the funeral obsequies of the late General John A. Rawlins, Secretary of War, Pennsylvania avenue was crowded from an early hour. The morning dawned beautifully, and throughout the day the weather was delightful, the heat of the sun being tempered by a refreshing breeze. The house tops, windows, porticoes, balconies, and footwalks along the route of the procession were packed with dense masses of spectators, among them being thousands of school children, the public and most of the private schools being closed for the day. The places of business along Pennsylvania avenue were closed; the stores and other buildings were draped in mourning and flags were at half-mast from all the prominent points.

At half-past 8 o'clock a.m., the carriages numbering about three hundred, assembled in front of Harvey & Marr's establishment, on F, between 9th and 10th streets, whence they proceeded to the War Department, and were formed in line by Mr. Harvey Riley, of the Depot Quartermaster's Department.

Arrival of Troops

This morning two batteries of the 4th Artillery from Fort McHenry, near Baltimore, arrived on the early train, and marched to quarters in Corcoran's building opposite the War Department, first taking breakfast at a neighboring restaurant. These batteries are D and E, and each number about 60 men. Lieutenants Ledyard and Eckhart being the officers of the first named, and Col. Miller with Captains Ayeriot and Chester of the latter.

At the War Department

At the War Department the doors were opened before nine o'clock, but no one was admitted except the family and friends of the deceased; the President of the United States and the Cabinet; Heads of Bureaus, Senators and Representatives, members of the Diplomatic Corps, Officers of the Army, and employes of the War Department. Of the Army, there were present Generals Sherman, Humphreys, O.O. Shiras, Townsend, Ramsey, Eaton Crane, Ekin, Michler, Eaton, Williams, Meigs, and Dyer; Judge Advocate General Holt; Colonels Lee, Douglas, Sutherland, Audenreid, Dayton, and many others of less rank; Governor elect Walker, of Virginia; Mayor Bowen of Washington; Judge Grisham, of Indiana, and a few other distinguished persons.

The President accompanied by Secretary Fish, Attorney General Hoar, Postmaster General Cresswell, Acting Secretary Richardson and Assistant Secretary Otto, proceeded to the Navy Department, where they were joined by Secretary Robeson, and marched to the War Department, entering by the east door.

The Diplomatic Corps met at the War Department, in the room of Adjutant General Townsend. Among them were Mr. Edward Thornton, the British Minister; Baron Gerolt, Minister of the North German Union; M. Defosse, Belgian Minister; Senor Magalhaens, Brazilian Minister; A. Mazel, Minister from the Netherlands; Mr. Dantas, of the Russian Legation; Baltazzi Effendi, of the Turkish Legation, and a large number of secretaries and attaches of the various legations.

When the procession moved, among those present were Admirals Dahlgren, Lee, Goldsborough, Poore and Bailey, Commodores Harwood and Case, Capt.s Shirk, Wyman, Simpson and Ammen, Commander Alden, Surgeon Williams, Majors Nicholson and Cash, of the Marine Corps and other Navy and Marine officers of lesser rank now on duty in this city.

The officers of the Navy and Marine Corps met at the Navy Department at nine o'clock, numbering about fifty, and took carriages in front of that department.

Mrs. Rawlins at the War Department

Mrs. Rawlins, wife of the Secretary, arrived here this morning on the early train and proceeded to Willard's Hotel, accompanied by Mrs. Hurlburt, her mother, and the three children of the Secretary by his former wife. At ten o'clock they reached the War Department, Mrs. Rawlins leaning on the arm of Commissioner Parker, the intimate friend of the late Secretary. Upon entering the room where the remains were, she seemed to be overwhelmed with grief. General Sherman very properly had the doors of the room closed after she and the other relatives of the deceased had entered. Besides those above mentioned there were present Mr. James Rawlins, brother of the General, Miss Sarah Rawlins, Mrs. Charles Hume, and Mr. and Mrs. T.L. Hume, cousins of the late Secretary. After the family had taken their last sorrowful look at the face of the deceased the doors of the room were thrown open.

Preparations for the Funeral

The President, Secretary Fish, Attorney General Hoar, Postmaster General Cresswell, Secretary Robeson, Acting Secretary Richardson, and Assistant Secretary Otto entered the room and passed around the coffin. They were followed by the officiating clergymen, Rev. Mr. Wilson, of McKendree Chapel; Rev. B. Peyton Brown, of Wesley Chapel; Rev. Dr. J.G. Butler, Chaplain of the House of Representatives and Rev. Dr. Wm. Hamilton. Then followed the members of the Diplomatic Corps, above mentioned; Drs. Bliss and Cady, the attending physicians of the deceased; Senators Cole and Spencer, Maj. McDonald, Reading Clerk of the Senate, Gen. Sherman, and the officers of the army as stated above.

The Funeral Service

All being in readiness, Rev. Dr. Butler, standing at the foot of the coffin, addressed the Throne of Divine Grace, as follows:

The Prayer

Great God! The God of our fathers, and the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thou art our King forever. We rejoice that Thou art the God of life and of death. We acknowledge thy hand in this painful dispensation, and reverently draw nigh to Thee in the name of Jesus, our elder brother, and beg Thee for his sake to have mercy on us. We thank Thee for the hope we have gathered around this coffin. Blessed be God for the hope inspired in us by the Gospels and the abundant consolations of these to Thy servants in their sorrow. We pray Thee to have the widow in Thy whole keeping and grant her Thy peace to enable her to bear her sorrows. We pray Thee that she may be sustained by Thine almighty hand. Thou art the Great Shepherd, care for these orphan ones, lambs of the flock. Be to them, in this time of the defencelessness and helplessness, a comfort and a consolation. Remember Thy servant, the President of the United States, give him wisdom and guide him and those associated with him in Cabinet Council. May those who bear rule in this land be guided by Thee and remember the account we must all render to

The Sermon ...

Closing Prayers ...

The Procession

The procession moved off in the following order: Battalion of U.S. Marines, under the command of Lieut. Colonel Haywood, four companies, numbering 120 men, commanded respectively by Lieuts Nokes, Young, Goodrill and Porter, headed by the fine band of the corps, numbering 28 pieces, led by

Scala, and 14 pieces of field music. This battalion in the showy uniform of the corps and by their fine state of discipline, attracted much attention.

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The Wallach School Building

At a special meeting of the Sub-Board of Trustees of Schools of the Third District, held yesterday afternoon, it was decided to make some demonstration, as the funeral cortege would pass the Wallach School Building. The building was accordingly draped in mourning, and as the procession passed the children of the various schools, numbering about 300, all dressed in white, were assembled on the terrace, and united in singing the following selection from the "Song Garden:"

The Soldier's Grave

Night winds are mournfully sweeping,
Whispering oak-branches wave
Where your loved ashes are sleeping,
Form of the true and the brave.
Silence reigns breathless around you,
All your stern conflicts are o'er,
Deep is the sleep that hath bound you,
Trumpet shall rouse you no more.

Sweet and serene be your slumber;
Hearts for whose freedom you bled,
Millions whom no man can number,
Tears of sad gratitude shed.
Never shall morn, brightly breaking,
Enter your chamber of gloom,
Till the last trumpet awaking
Sounds through the depths of the tomb.

At the Cemetery

At an early hour this morning the principal gateway of Congressional Cemetery was draped in mourning, as also the vault of the Blagden family, situated a few yards south of the gate on the main walk, in which the remains of the deceased were to be deposited. Long before the procession appeared in sight large numbers gathered about the cemetery and some were admitted, but the larger portion were kept out. Lieutenant Austin, with the officers of the Eight Precinct, kept the vicinity of the vault clear, while the officers of the Second Precinct, (Lieutenant Johnson,) being mounted, kept the entrance clear.

At the Tomb

At 12:15 the hearse was halted at the gate, and, preceded by the clergy, the pall-bearers, and the undertakers, Messrs. Harvey A. Marr, the remains were carried slowly to the vault—the band playing a dead march—by eight cavalymen, where it was placed on the bier, the mourners following.

The Service At The Tomb

Just before the remains reached the vault of Mr. Thomas Blagden, Rev. S.A. Wilson, of McKendree Chapel, who attended the deceased in his last illness, read the burial services of the Methodist Episcopal Church as follows:

I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die -- John xi, 25, 26.

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another. -- Job xix, 25-27

We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord -- 1 Tim, vi, 7; Job 1,21.

The remains were then laid in the tomb, and Mr. Wilson continued the service by saying:

“Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He

The Salute

As soon as the services at the tomb were over the usual honors were paid by the troops -- Col. Dupont's Battery firing three salvos from a point on Georgia avenue, west of the cemetery and the marines and artillery three volleys of musketry.

Departure of the Troops

The two battens of the 4th artillery from Fort McHenry left in the 2:50 train this afternoon for Baltimore. The two batteries from Fortress Monroe will return tomorrow.

The Vault

In conversation with General Sherman yesterday, Mr. Harvey spoke of the crowded state of the receiving vault at the Congressional Cemetery, and suggested to the General that it would be well to endeavor to procure the use of one of the private vaults. General Sherman agreed with him, and wrote a letter, stating the circumstances, which he gave to Mr. Harvey, to be used as he saw fit. In company with Mr. Marr, Mr. H. visited Mr. Thomas Blagden, Esq. of this city yesterday afternoon, and that gentleman at once proffered the use of his commodious private vault, which was used for the reception of the remains of the illustrious dead, as above stated.

The Disposition of the Remains

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Washington, Sept. 7, 1869 – Hon. John M. Palmer, Springfield, Ill. Your telegrams of this day were submitted to the President, who directs me to say that it has been decided to bury General Rawlins in the Congressional Burying Ground, whence he can be removed, if desirable, hereafter. With this view, his body has been embalmed. John E. Smith.

...

Sad Accident ...

Executors of the Will of General Rawlins

President Grant and Mrs. Rawlins were selected by General Rawlins as the executors of his will. It will not be admitted to probate till after the return of the President from his trip North.

The Rawlins Subscription Fund ...

The Plaster Cast Not Taken ...

Meeting of the City Councils ...

Meetings Last Night ...

Scenes and Incidents ...

In Baltimore ...

The Evening Star, September 11, 1869

Bust of the Late Secretary Rawlins--

A Cast Taken by M. Fisk Mills

Yesterday Messrs. Harvey & Marr, the undertakers, who had charge of the arrangements of the funeral of the lamented Secretary Rawlins, erected before the entrance of the tomb an arch formed of American flags and heavily draped in mourning. Mr. Fisk Mills, arrived at the cemetery grounds about two o'clock p.m., and preparations were made to obtain a cast of the face of the deceased. The burial case was taken from the vault and placed under the arch already formed, and the lid being removed, he proceeded to take the cast. The body and coffin trimmings were covered with cloths to prevent their being soiled. A coating of sweet oil was rubbed over the face, and a composition of plaster of paris and other ingredients was mixed, and while soft was spread over the face. In a little time this became quite hard, and was lifted off, giving a very fine cast of the features of the deceased. The operation was very successful, Mr. Mills being greatly pleased, saying that it was "very sharp," and would enable him to make a correct likeness of the deceased. The coffin lid was reset in cement and the remains replaced in the vault. The manner in which a cast will be taken is as follows: The mould as taken from the face will be prepared, and then filled with liquid plaster. This becoming hard, the mold will be taken off, the superfluous plaster cut away, and a fac simile of the face presented. It is the intention of Mr. Mills to make first a bust and then a statuette of the late Secretary.

The Evening Star, November 4, 1872

The body of Secretary Rawlins (late of Gen. Grant's staff) is still in the public vault at the Congressional Cemetery, but a few days since Gen. Babcock and a brother of the deceased went to the cemetery, and selected a site for the burial of the remains in the southwest section of the inclosure.