

**THE
EGYPTIANS**



1979-80

YEAR BOOK

*Dear - Don't mean to bombard you, but
this was just published by the Egyptians.
No need to return it. J.R.*

**FORT ADAMS AND FORT PICKERING:
THE FIRST AMERICAN FORTS
ON THE MEMPHIS BLUFF**

James Roper

Read before The Egyptians, February, 1980

The Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, on which the city of Memphis stands today, has been defended – theoretically at least – by five forts. French Assumption and Spanish San Fernando have been treated in reasonably full detail, while, on the other hand, Civil War Fort Pickering has been left in the total oblivion to which Memphis' Confederate historians evidently felt its Yankeeeness entitled it. The other two, Fort Adams and its immediate successor the earlier Fort Pickering, the first American posts on the Bluff, have not been wholly neglected, though if they had been it might have been better so, since the meager information furnished has attained a perfection of garble not often reached by dedicated avoiders of research. This paper is an effort at providing as detailed and authentic an account as the available sources seem to provide about the origin of these two forts and what happened during their consecutive lifetimes covering the years 1797-1814.

After the Revolutionary War Spain claimed the whole east bank of the Mississippi River as far north as the Ohio, by “right of conquest” combined with a denial of the British right to transfer their territory there to the Americans anyhow. Finally in 1795 a treaty was drawn up at the palace of San Lorenzo whereby His Most Catholic Majesty, threatened by the British with war and anxious to reduce his dangers, promised the United States he would evacuate the east bank north of the 31st parallel. But America's international situation soon became unsettled because of friction with France, and Spain took advantage by temporizing about carrying out her pledge.

By the late spring of 1797 the newly-inaugurated President Adams decided he had taken about as much of Spanish mañana as he was prepared to accept. So far as he knew at the time, Spain still held her posts at San Fernando (Memphis), Nogales (Vicksburg), and Natchez, all of them north of the new boundary line. He was

correct about the latter two, but since news traveled slowly indeed in the total wilderness of the Bluff area, he was not aware that Fort San Fernando had been in ashes since March – that is, for about a month. A portion of its garrison, twelve men and a sergeant, had been transferred across the river to a small stockade called Campo de Esperanza, or Hopefield. Actually the destruction of the fort had almost been prevented by a countermanding order which, however, arrived just too late. After the evacuation order had been issued, shifting alliances in Europe and the hostile attitude of the American Federalist government toward Spain and her new ally France prompted a reversal of foreign policy in Madrid. Notification of the harder line reached New Orleans and a rider was dispatched post haste to stop the dismantling of Fort San Fernando, but the efficient Don Carlos Howard had already put it to the torch. Under the circumstances the Spanish saw no reason to notify the American government of the evacuation, and even seem to have been contemplating the re-establishment of the fort.

In May James Wilkinson, commanding general of the American field forces, received orders at Pittsburgh to force the issue by sending troops down the Mississippi River. The ultimate aim would be to reinforce those units still waiting at Natchez for the Spanish to withdraw, but on the way the expedition was to occupy, by force if necessary, any Spanish post still on the east bank. To command this flatboat flotilla Wilkinson selected Captain Isaac Guion of the 3rd Regiment, “an officer of tried confidence and proved intelligence who had served . . . before Quebec, and possessed great energy of character.” The tribute, though merited well enough, came with a certain irony from the pen of Wilkinson, that “finished scoundrel” and “tarnished warrior” who was in the pay of Spain as an undercover agent even while he was heading the Army of the United States, and who would later betray Aaron Burr to save his own hide. Wilkinson’s orders to Guion are a masterpiece of ambiguity:

On approaching a Spanish post on this side of Louisiana [the east bank] you are to announce your disposition to offer a salute provided you are assured it will be answered gun for gun. You are to return to Massac [Fort Massac, near the Ohio mouth] with your detachment or take a military disposition within the limits of the United States as your judgment may direct. But when once posted you are to defend your ground to the last extremity; waiting always with patience for the attack. The smallest default will fill me with mortification and insure your own ruin.

Guion set out from Fort Washington (Cincinnati) in June, 1797, his force consisting of 2 subalterns, a surgeon’s mate, 7 sergeants, 7 corporals, 4 musicians, and 98 privates. There was added power in the form of 4 cannon, and added comfort in the form of 24 hogsheads of rye whiskey. At St. Louis the Spanish commandant halted the flatboat procession and asked Guion to wait for clarification from his superiors. A compromise was reached: Guion pledged not to proceed beyond the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff (Memphis) without hearing further from St. Louis. The War Department later disavowed Guion’s parole, but circumstances obliged him to linger at the Bluff anyway. He had not been sure he would even find San Fernando ready to yield gracefully; he was not at all prepared to find it a mass of charred rubble.

When he arrived on July 20 he was hailed by a delegation of about a hundred Chickasaws. Since 1783, when the tribe’s long and friendly relationship with the British came to its necessary end, the Chickasaws had been divided on foreign policy. About a fourth of the warriors were pro-American under the leadership of the warlike but aging Piomingo and the half-Scots sons of James Logan Colbert. The three-fourths majority, led by the peace-loving Wolf’s Friend, believed that the weaker and milder Spanish regime offered the best hope for the tribe’s future, and it was they who had sold the Spanish the enclave on which Fort San Fernando had been built. Needless to say, it was the Piomingo-Colbert party who helped Guion’s men ashore; they had been outraged for two years by the Spanish cession, made without unanimous approval of the tribe as called for in cases of land grants. Chief William Colbert, his hour come round at last, had been waiting for two months at the Bluff for the “presents” promised him by the War Department – guns and ammunition with which to get on with the endless feud he and Piomingo waged with the Creek nation. The Spanish had been chary about letting any Indians have even firearms, while the United States had cheerfully sent Piomingo various weapons including a mortar.

Also greeting Guion as he landed was a note from Don Agustín Grande, sergeant in command at Esperanza, stating that he had received no orders to let the flotilla pass and that he would “beg the favor to stop your boats at the island above this post.” Guion replied that as to Grande’s having no orders to pass him, “This I doubt not, nor that you have any orders to the contrary, as they would be extraordinary indeed,” His suspicion that the Spanish intended to

re-occupy the east bank was confirmed when he learned that a large shipment of Indian goods had arrived at Esperanza just before his arrival. He had nothing in his orders about building a new fort, but he felt the need for one was acute enough to proceed on his own, even though it would delay his reaching Natchez. Wilkinson a few months later would find this decision "very judicious," and remark that "The minister [Secretary] of War now approves that he would not allow in the spring."

To build such a fort, Guion reported, would require "the general consent of all the Chiefs and headsmen to suffer us to sit down here." Wolf's Friend and his party had been put into disarray by the treaty of San Lorenzo, and now the Piomingo-Colbert faction dominated. It appears that the latter insisted that Guion put his new fort on the same ground as that which San Fernando had occupied, by way of rubbing the rival party's collective nose in the same dirt they had sold to Spain. This requirement did not help with Guion's diplomatic problem of getting the whole tribe's assent, and besides, Guion was well aware of the gross deficiencies of the San Fernando site, on low ground overlooked by higher, and with an obstructed river view. He reported, however, that he believed the "spot for a fortress is an eligible one and can, to go below, be abandoned at almost any time." "Below" probably meant the much superior site on the high bluffs commanding the great curve of the river two miles downstream, where Fort Assumption had stood and where two later Forts Pickering would stand. Meanwhile Guion bowed to diplomatic necessities.

On August 16 a general council was held on the Bluff. Wolf's Friend was there to argue the opposition, probably attired in the scarlet coat with silver lace which he usually wore on formal occasions, with an attendant to hold his large crimson umbrella over him. James Robertson, the best white friend the Chickasaws ever had, found Wolf's Friend to be "one of the best-disposed men I ever knew of the colour. He has endeavoured to keep his nation at peace with the whole world." The less peaceful Spanish had bolstered the Esperanza stockade with a hundred soldiers sent in five galleys from New Madrid under Don Carlos Howard, who asked to attend the conference as an observer. Guion, since he had satisfied himself that his store of largesse to be handed out was far greater than that which the Spanish had just issued, allowed Don Carlos to be on hand.

William Colbert and Piomingo were both illustrious warriors

who had fought for the white Americans under General Wayne at Fallen Timbers against the Indians of the Northwest, and had visited President Washington afterward. Both were no doubt sporting the fine uniforms they had received for their services, as counter-finery to Wolf's Friend. The veteran Piomingo was making his last recorded public appearance, but his support of Colbert in the debate was vigorous. Wolf's Friend, on the other hand, greatly disappointed his followers by becoming moody and silent. Finally, against the backdrop of American military might making its debut on the Chickasaws' cherished Bluff, the tribe gave its whole approval to the new fort. Wolf's Friend accepted his presents along with the other chiefs, but he took the occasion to warn his fellow tribesmen that the Americans had "hard shoes" and would soon tread painfully on the soft moccasins of the Chickasaws.

Until this writing the exact location of Guion's fort has not been known, even if only in relation to that of San Fernando. The present writer has turned up in the Archives of the Indies at Seville a letter from a Spanish observer across the river, a former commandant at San Fernando, who locates Guion's "sexangular" stockade on the site of the northwest bastion of San Fernando. Unfortunately the exact spot of San Fernando itself is not known accurately, though it was near the northwest corner of today's Auction Square and between Front Street and the River. Except for these details of shape and approximate location, nothing is known of the plan of the first American fort at Memphis.

The fevers always endemic to the Bluff delayed the construction of what Guion called "A snug little cover for one hundred men to maintain a foothold," but by October 22, 1797, he was able to report to the Secretary of War that "I have this day, having the gates finished and put up and my flagstaff erected, under a Federal salute, called the fort Adams." His flag had been made on the Bluff. The powder magazine and the barrack had not yet been completed.

Guion found four white families in the area and identified two of them. Kenneth Ferguson, agent for the Spanish trading empire of Panton, Leslie, & Company, had been running a trading post in a ravine or swale near what is today Union Avenue at the river. John Mizell (or "Masle", or even "Measles") was an "inoffensive" North Carolinian who had lived among the Chickasaws for sixteen years and had acted as interpreter for the Spanish; his talents would be employed for another quarter of a century by Americans on the Bluff.

Ten days after the fort's christening ceremony Guion took up again his mission to Natchez, being now more than three months behind schedule. He left at Fort Adams as garrison 2 sergeants, 2 corporals, and 24 privates, under command of Lieutenant Joseph Campbell. Included were 6 "mattresses" or artillerymen who served "three Iron 6 pounders and two 2 and 3/4 inch howitzers." But Wilkinson and his friend Guion had political foes in high places, and by the year's end Wilkinson wrote Guion that "Capt. John Pierce has been sent by the Secretary /of War/ himself to command at the Bluffs, with a select corps of incomparable rascals under Lewis, Marschaulk, and Steele." History has proved just how much jaundice there really was in Wilkinson's eye about these "rascals:" Andrew Marschalk would become a pioneer of Mississippi journalism, John Steele would become governor of the Mississippi Territory, and Meriwether Lewis would become immortal. Pierce soon died of fever and Captain Lewis, of the First Infantry Regiment, found himself in command of Fort Adams.

His orders were to:

keep the works always in condition to resist attacks; practice the same precaution against surprise as if the United States were actually in war; fix upon regular and stated hours for exercise . . . direct four roll-calls every day.

Lewis was already a veteran of the Whiskey Rebellion and Fallen Timbers, as was also his close friend and Virginia neighbor William Clark. While Lewis was in command at Fort Adams in the spring of 1798 Clark was making his way down the Mississippi on a business trip to New Orleans, sketching channels as he went. He stopped off at the Bluff for several days, a longer stay than he had intended because of the stormy weather. This meeting on the Bluff of these soon-to-be-famous Americans has gone unnoticed by Memphis historians, and, indeed, by the biographers of both men.

While Lewis and Clark were swapping news on the Bluff between roll calls in that March of 1798, the Spanish were finally persuaded to disgorge Natchez. Wilkinson was ordered to move his headquarters there and build a large fort to protect the key boundary position on the 31st parallel. He set out from Pittsburgh in leisurely fashion, delaying at Fort Massac where Captain Zebulon Pike commanded. This was not the celebrated explorer Zebulon M. Pike, as some Memphis historians would have it, but his father, who had not a middle initial to his name. An advance party reached Fort Adams in early August, and Lewis was told to prepare his garrison

for transfer downriver, where the new fortress on Loftus Heights would pre-empt the presidential name from the presumptuous Bluff stockade. By a stroke of luck, or perhaps by string-pulling, Lewis was transferred to Fort Washington just before Wilkinson showed up with his flotilla of 27 boats on August 22. Captain Pike and his Massac troops had been brought along with the expedition.

The commanding general seems to have intended to stop at the Bluff only a day or two, since orders were immediately posted for sailing "at the earliest light" on the 24th. In the end, however, he stayed two weeks. This fact suggests that it was only after his arrival that the question of moving the fort was brought up. On the day of arrival Wilkinson seems to have had in mind only some additions and repairs to the existing stockade. His Order Book provided "handy men" to cut timber and erect sheds, while the Quartermaster was to provide materials for "preservation, improvement, and defence." But four days later the General was still on the Bluff, in a cantonment which he had gone to the trouble of giving a name, "Constitution Camp." It was no doubt near the flatboat landing at the mouth of Bayou Gayoso, north of the fort.

Here messengers caught up with him. The threat of war with France had grown so acute that George Washington had been called out of retirement as the nominal supreme commander of field forces, with Alexander Hamilton as second in command and real general-in-chief. Wilkinson rendered a salute to these "distinguished worthies" now intervening between him and the Secretary of War, and also hailed a raise in pay just granted to the G.I.'s of the day (though the general opinion was that getting \$5 a month instead of \$4 would go to the privates' heads and turn them all into drunkards).

The best available explanation for Wilkinson's delay at the Bluff seems to be that he had decided to move the fort and had to negotiate with the Chickasaws. On the 29th of August the password at Constitution Camp was "Chickasaw" and the countersign was "Wolf's Friend." The next night it was "Colbert" and "Piomingo", an arrangement that indicates representatives of both tribal factions were on hand. No further hint of negotiations exists in Wilkinson's Order Book, which was not, after all, a journal. There wasn't too much to argue about, really: Piomingo and Colbert had already made their gesture of revenge, and anyway it would probably suit the Chickasaws better to have the new fort well away from their customary landing place. But solemnities had to be preserved, and gifts given.

Whatever the preliminaries, Wilkinson's Order Book on August 31 gives us the first real intimation that a new fort has been decided upon, and the first appearance of its name: "Captain Pike and his Company with a Detachment of Artillerists and Engineers, will constitute the garrison of Fort Pickering on the Mississippi." The incumbent garrison of "rascals" was sent down to Natchez, and Pike was to draw "the quantum of tools, implements, stores, and ammunition necessary to his command." The new name was in honor of Timothy Pickering, Adams' Secretary of State. On September 4 the required supplies were ordered to be unloaded as quickly as possible, and Pike to be ready to assume command the next evening. On the morning of the 6th Wilkinson resumed his voyage.

Strictly speaking, one cannot derive from all these data that the actual location of the Bluff fort was changed at this time, but only that a new name was bestowed, a new garrison assigned, and considerable building and digging planned. However, there seems little reason to doubt that the decision to move down to the high bluffs was made by Wilkinson during his stop-over. The superiority of the southern site had been obvious to everybody all along, with the exception of Manuel Gayoso who went against his military advisers in preferring the northern spot. The convenient fact of having the top brass right on hand to see for himself the need to move, and the issue of tools and supplies to Pike for more construction than had been authorized on the first day of the halt, all point to the conclusion that building of the new fort began at this time. The total absence of any other correspondence or written discussion about the removal supports the idea it was done by verbal orders.

Construction, however, may have been a slow process, as usual. Receipts have recently come to light in the National Archives (and until this point have been unpublished) covering such items as "Eleven pounds of Hemp for the Use of Corking Boats to move from the Old Garrison to the New," or "Pound and a half of Shingle Nails for the Use of the New Garrison." These and others of similar import are dated at Fort Pickering in the month of May, 1800. The "Old Garrison" seems to have acquired the name of "Pike's Fort" for lack of a better, no doubt during the interim when Pickering was still under construction and the Old Garrison was still Pike's headquarters. The buildings of what had been Fort Adams remained serviceable for some time, of course, and must have been used for storage or other purposes while they lasted. "Pike's Fort" is shown

in the chart of *The Navigator* (the pilot's manual of the Mississippi) as being in the Fort Adams location while the more formally titled "Fort Pickering" is two miles south of it. This reference to "Pike's Fort" led to certain confusion in later times, giving rise to the notion that there had been three American forts on the Bluff during this period.

The precise location of Fort Pickering is no better known than that of San Fernando or Adams. Tradition puts it where the Memphis-Arkansas Bridge rests on the east bank of the river today. We shall see later that from a distance, seen from the river below, the Bluff there appeared to have a watch-tower on its "summit" and the stockade on its "brow." About the only place in the general area where the top of the Bluff would appear other than level is where the Indian mounds in what is now De Soto Park would give an elevation for a "summit" above a "brow". To a commandant seeking height for a watch-tower the mound nearest the river would have been invaluable. On the other hand, it would have been a military boner to leave such an elevation just outside the stockade where it could command the interior. Logic concludes that the mounds were included within the fortifications, or if not, then the fort must have been sufficiently far away from them to the north so it was not threatened. A ravine immediately to the south of the mounds would mark the probable limit for the fort's location in that direction.

The shape of the fort is not known. The standard fort recommended by the War Department for Indian country at this time called for a square of 120 feet on each side, with blockhouses two stories high and 20 feet square projecting at the corners. Stockade timbers should be "slightly hewed" and the spaces plastered with clay or lime. Chimneys and magazine should be of brick, the magazine preferably in the form of a cone with an 8-foot base and "without any wind except the door." Blockhouses, of course, should project enough to "effectually annoy almost any number of Indians which attempt assault." However, at the time of its building Fort Pickering was not only a possible defense against Indians, it was also in command of river traffic and it looked across at potentially hostile territory belonging to Spain; its specifications may have therefore been modified to suit this greater and more permanent function. We do know that its stockade was 15 feet high and was made of hewn logs rather than the "round-pole" kind.

In recommending to Hamilton troop dispositions for the lower Mississippi Valley, Wilkinson called for a "subaltern's command at

Fort Pickering (say Chickasaw Bluffs) as a 'locum tenens' to preserve our exclusive intercourse with the Chickasaw Indians." The Bluff fort's demotion in name was underlined by placing it under the command of the new Fort Adams at Natchez, for which, in the thinking of the War Department, it served as a back-up station in a time when the greatest threat appeared to come from Spanish New Orleans.

Just as the transfer to the new site was being completed in the spring of 1800, Captain Pike relinquished his command to Captain Richard Sparks, son-in-law of John Sevier. Sparks had a romantic background, having been captured by Shawnees at the age of five and reared with Tecumseh's family, returning to the white man's world after Fallen Timbers. In November, 1800, the military stance of the United States in the West was shifted about to face the northern threat from Britain in the Great Lakes and Northwest areas. Fort Pickering was transferred away from its Natchez headquarters and put under Colonel David Strong, who was in charge of the "lower waters of the Ohio" and whose superior was responsible for all the posts and garrisons west of the mountains and northwest of the Ohio. Pickering's role in its position midway between the north and south danger areas seems to have caused some indecision in the War Department, a pattern that would persist in the future.

In the autumn of 1801 Wilkinson returned to the Bluff to treat with the Chickasaws about widening and improving the Natchez Trace, still only a horse trail, into a wagon road. We learn that the Spanish still had their twelve men at Esperanza, though the stockade was rotting away. Fort Pickering's 25 men had been rendering yeoman service in rescuing boats and aiding emigrants, and Sparks received official praise.

The presidency of Thomas Jefferson brought about a distinct change in the purpose of government trading posts dealing with the Indians. Hitherto there had been only two of them, as a measure to counter Spanish influence among Cherokees and Creeks and to keep good will. Jefferson, however, thought that the most humane solution to the problem of the Southeast Indians was to lure the red men into debt and then take their lands from them in exchange for new territory in the limitless West. In 1802 four "factories" were added to the first two, and one was put at Fort Pickering to entice Choctaws and Chickasaws into bankruptcy. The commandment was instructed to build a storehouse for the factor, who was a salaried employee of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which was part of

the War Department. The factor was forbidden to engage in trade on his own. The first one on the Bluff, Thomas Peterkin, arrived with his goods in the fall of 1802, and was granted the services of a "sober, discreet" soldier who would be free of garrison duty and earn 10¢ a day as well.

The career of the Fort Pickering Indian factory proved to be longer than that of the fort itself, flourishing until 1818 and then existing in some residual form until 1822 when the whole system was abolished. That career is a good story in its own right, but our present concern is with the fort itself, and only a sketch is possible. Jefferson's ulterior motive faded from the scene soon enough, and the factories became merely an accommodation for the Indians. Peterkin remained until 1807 and was succeeded by four factors in the next seven years. When Robert Bayly died in January, 1814, he had no assistant and there were no longer any troops on hand to provide a guard. Judge Benjamin Fooy, the magistrate living across the river, did what he could to safeguard the \$10,000 in merchandise until the new factor, Isaac Rawlings, arrived in May. Rawlings, one of the more colorful characters of early Memphis history and several times mayor in later days, stayed at the Bluff as factor until 1818, when he moved most of the factory to northwest Arkansas and was still there when Memphis was laid off as a town. His assistant Paul Ballio remained at the Bluff as caretaker.

That same fall of 1802 in which Peterkin installed the factory found the fort in a state of alarm. Spain had secretly retroceded Louisiana to Napoleon, and at his instigation she closed off new Orleans to American trade despite the 1795 treaty. In response to this outrage the Pickering garrison was moved downriver quickly to Natchez and was replaced by some 20 privates and non-coms from Massac. The following spring Captain George Carmichael of the 2nd Regiment of Artillery and Engineers was ordered to move his company from Southwest Point (Kingston, Tennessee) to Pickering, where he would relieve the Massac detachment and assume permanent command. From this time on Pickering was manned entirely by artillerymen.

Just as the crisis seemed to be breaking into war the Louisiana Purchase was proclaimed and Pickering ceased to be a border post. Carmichael's orders were to take over Esperanza and Arkansas Post. The former was soon abolished and Arkansas Post shared commanders with Pickering for some time, the commander deciding where he would reside.

Three years later another crisis arose with Spain, this time along the new boundary of the Sabine River, and all troops in the lower Mississippi Valley were rushed to field headquarters at Natchitoches, Louisiana. As an afterthought in the orders, however, the War Department added, over a caret, "except Fort Pickering." Ambiguity about the fort's role seemed to be degenerating into forgetfulness. In the end Fort Pickering's position proved to be rather like that of Christopher Robin halfway down the stairs, neither up nor down,

It isn't really anywhere,
It's somewhere else instead!"

This ambiguity between North and South, not to mention East and West, has haunted the Memphis area regularly since these pioneer days.

Such heyday as Fort Pickering might be thought of as having covers the years 1806 through 1809. Actually, nothing much happened at the fort, militarily or otherwise, at any time; it is remembered mostly for its visitors. Thomas Ashe, one of those many touring Englishmen of the 19th Century who found the American wilderness exotic and romantic, arrived in May of 1806 after coming down the river for a hundred miles without seeing a single habitation. He gave us our only view of the fort as seen from the river, as well as the only panoramic sweep over the surrounding terrain atop the Bluff as it was before the founding of Memphis. From below, the high bluff was a "noble object." He noted that "On its summit stands a lonely watch-tower; on its brow the garrison and fort mounted with guns." The barracks, along with the houses and stores for the "two state commissioners conducting government trade with the Indians," were surrounded by "extensive and elevated gardens" in which fruits and vegetables thrived (in May this must have been hearsay). Outside the fort area a dozen families raised corn and poultry to sell to river travelers, amid "cultivated fields and pasture lands of much rural character and extent." The view out over Louisiana was superb. A "very sumptuous dinner" of fish, bear, venison, and squirrel was accompanied by such a flow of wine that Ashe had to restrain himself as he thought about having to "scramble down the hundred and fifty feet of declivity that led to my boat."

A few months later, just at the New Year of 1807, the Bluff had a more sinister visitor whose motive was not tourism but conspiracy. Aaron Burr did not know it as he climbed the Bluff, but Jefferson

had just ordered his arrest for treason, and the hue and cry was springing up along the river behind him. Commandant at the time over the fort's 20 men was Lieutenant Jacob Jackson, whose father was an old friend of Burr's in Virginia. During his one-day stop the former Vice President talked Jackson, who seems to have been already disenchanted with his army career, into resigning his commission and recruiting men for Burr's mysterious enterprises. The co-operative lieutenant received expense money for this purpose, and in turn allowed Burr to purchase lead and have 500 musket balls molded at the fort. When Burr was taken into custody a few days later at Bayou Pierre downstream, Jackson found himself involved as a witness and possible accomplice. Peterkin the factor testified against Jackson with obvious scorn and hostility, but ultimately Jackson was a fringe beneficiary of Burr's acquittal.

A year and a half after Jackson's subornation, in May of 1808, another transient Englishman brought his flatboat into the Bluff landing. Fortescue Cuming had roamed far and wide over the world and now planned to settle down at Natchez. He had visited with Judge Fooy across the river, but he did not go directly across from there to the mouth of Wolf River. He was told, though, of half a dozen families living there, and of "Pike's Fort" having been there. It was Cuming's report that put the name of the extinct fort on the *Navigator* map.

At the Fort Pickering landing his curiosity, not to say uneasiness, was aroused by the sight of a painted Chickasaw warrior carrying a bow and arrows. Cuming went up a "stair of one hundred and twenty logs," following an ominous trail of dribbled blood all the way. At the top were another fifty or so warriors lounging about on the grass, most of them painted "in a grotesque but not terrifying manner." Just as Cuming began to deduce a general massacre of the garrison he saw a "good-looking young white sentinel in the American uniform" and was ushered into the officers' quarters where he was received by a Lieutenant Taylor, the commandant, "with civility not unmixed with a small degree of pompous stiffness of office." Taylor explained that the Indians were celebrating the arrival of "presents" and that the blood came from a deer carcass.

Until now all Memphis historians have held that this Lieutenant Taylor was Zachary, the future military hero and president. This is an error. At the time of Cuming's visit the young Zachary Taylor had not yet accepted his commission as an officer; he did so about a week later at his home in Louisville, Kentucky, where he then waited

five months for an assignment. At last he went to Mason County, Kentucky, for recruiting duty and only in May, 1809, a year after his commissioning and after Cuming's visit, was he commandant for about a month at Fort Pickering before being sent on down to New Orleans. The Taylor who received Cuming was Zachary's older brother, William Dabney Strother Taylor. Oddly enough, he was killed by Indians, tribe unknown, just a few days after Cuming took his leave down the ironically blood-stained stair. The exact date and circumstances of William's death were never known, but it occurred in the first week of June, 1808, about the time Zachary was receiving his commission.

Toward the end of summer in 1809 the fort entertained its last noteworthy visitor. Captain Gilbert C. Russell had succeeded Zachary Taylor as commandant when at about two o'clock in the afternoon of September 15 Meriwether Lewis came climbing groggily up the hundred and twenty steps, trembling and weak with fever and worries. He was now governor of that vast Louisiana Territory which he had so arduously explored. Political adversaries, including adherents of his old foe Wilkinson, were harassing him, and the Washington bureaucracy was investigating malicious charges about his accounts. He had decided to go to the national capital and straighten things out, and had set out from St. Louis down the Mississippi toward New Orleans, from where he meant to go by sea. However, he fell seriously ill and became deeply depressed before reaching the Pickering bluff, and he stopped off to recover. Despite his condition, he seems to have been accorded the same alcoholic welcome that Ashe got, and under the combined stress of anxiety, sickness, and the spirits in which he did not ordinarily over-indulge, he became delirious and suicidal.

Captain Russell put him under restraint for five days in care of the surgeon's mate until his symptoms ceased and his mind cleared. A week later he was ready to go on to Washington, but rumors of impending war with Britain caused him concern that his papers might be seized at sea, so he set out overland after buying two pack mules and borrowing three horses from the fort. With him went the Cherokee agent, Major Neely, and Lewis' two faithful followers, the punch-drunk Creole voyageur called Perney and a black servant identified variously as Jim or Tom. The foursome left Pickering along the Chickasaw trail (more or less Highway 78 today) toward its intersection with the Natchez Trace, Lewis waving goodbye to the garrison as his striped dust-coat disappeared into the forest. A few

days later he was found shot to death on the Trace in Middle Tennessee, and history has yet to decide whether it was murder or suicide.

Even before Lewis arrived at the fort, the War Department had been having misgivings about the unhealthiness of the Bluff region, especially during the sweltering, fever-ridden summers. When Russell asked permission to rehabilitate the aging stockade, he was told to make only absolutely necessary repairs. In the hot part of 1810 only a corporal and three privates sweated it out at Pickering, probably not really so much acting as a military garrison as to provide a minimal guard for the factory goods. Then Factor John Treat was given permission to use for his purposes any buildings belonging to the War Department, apparently including the barrack building. One thus gathers that higher headquarters did not plan a return of the troops that had been withdrawn for the summer. Treat soon complained about the "lawless vending of whiskey and the insolence of the Indians in the absence of a garrison." Had not war come in 1812 Pickering would no doubt have disappeared entirely.

On August 20 of that year General James Winchester, in the midst of mobilizing troops at Lexington, Kentucky, ordered a detachment of 35 men under a "discrete subaltern officer" to be sent "without loss of time" to guard the post at the Chickasaw Bluff. If was apparently this detachment which was discovered at Pickering the following January by the Reverend Learner Blackman, chaplain to Andrew Jackson's river expedition to Natchez. Blackman was with an advance element of Jackson's flotilla when on January 5 he recorded in his diary a stop-over at Pickering during which he preached to "about 40 soldiers stationed at the fort." He cut his sermon short because they were "bad off for clothing," and one was even barefooted. The fort still had "several pretty good frame houses," and to Blackman's ministerial eye it seemed capable of accommodating "5 or 600 soldiers" within its "picquetted in" enclosure.

This forlorn garrison was removed from the Bluff at some time during 1813, probably as the result of the panic that followed in the West upon the successive disasters of Generals Hull and Winchester in the Detroit area. In early 1814, after the death of Factor Bayly and while Judge Fooy was doing his best to protect the factory goods, a former Pickering commandant happened upon the scene and discovered \$10,000 in government merchandise entirely at the mercy of "hostile tribes of Indians." Richard Sparks, now colonel of

the 2nd Regiment, wrote immediately to James Robertson, The Chickasaw Agent, for help in protecting the public stores "and [Chickasaw] Annuity," and sent orders to the 4th Regiment to provide a guard detachment until further orders.

Upon receipt of this information the Secretary of War recommended to the President that the Chickasaw Bluff be given up as a "military or other post for public purposes, and that one more healthy be selected." The wording seems to include the factory as well as the fort, but the trading operation went on after Rawlings arrived in May. The military post, however, lasted only until the following fall. On September 1, 1814, Major James Dougherty of the 24th Infantry, the next-to-last commandant at Pickering, wrote to report the fort's demise. The letter has not previously been published, nor were the details of Pickering's last days previously known. Dougherty had been holding orders to leave Pickering since the previous July, but had to await the return of his only subordinate officer.

I have this day delivered over command of the Post to Lieutenant Allen and directed him to comply with the orders . . . removing the troops and public property to New Orleans so soon as he can procure transport and the health and situation of the Troops will admit of removal, which I fear will not be practicable before some time in October . . . In all my service in the army I have never witnessed so much sickness in the same number of men, I presume greatly owing to their not having proper medical aid. There is no Surgeon at this Post; we are entirely destitute of hospital stores and [have] but very few medicines proper to give.

In other words, the fort on the Bluff came to an end in the fall of 1814 under circumstances foreshadowing the way the first city on the same Bluff came to an end 64 years later, amid the devastation of a fever epidemic, worsened by medical ignorance and official negligence in providing whatever help the medicine of the day might have given.

Fort Pickering, like many frontier posts, never figured in any military operations of any real kind. Its garrison was seldom larger than a score or so of ailing artillerymen; the largest total on record was only about twice that figure. It was mostly a river check point and rescue station, never fitting into the military scheme of things too vitally or clearly, even when it was a border station. Its historical credentials are largely its interesting commandments and its

visitors. From its high balcony it watched for sixteen years the colorful pageant of frontier America as it passed by, and it ended, not with a bang from its artillery that was never fired in anger, but with a whimper from parched and delirious soldiers.