Guide

BENJAMIN H. GRIERSON & SONS
1868 - 1882 & undated

Archives of the Big Bend
Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library
Sui Ross State University
Alpine, Texas
General Benjamin H. Grierson, perhaps best known for Grierson’s Raid during the Civil War and the 1880 campaign against the Apache Victoria, also performed ably as a musician, peacemaker, and builder. After the war, posted to Indian Territory, he was responsible for the construction of Fort Sill. When Grierson was transferred with the 10th Cavalry from Fort Sill to Fort Concho, Texas in 1875, he undertook renovations to that deteriorating post in part to reduce encounters and violence between the troops and the local population by occupying the soldiers. One project in 1875 at Fort Concho was a window-mounted weather station.

When he was named commander of the District of the Pecos in West Texas in 1878, he set the 10th Cavalry to scouting and mapping the district and constructing and maintaining miles of wagon roads and telegraph lines, making it safe for the railroads and settlers. With the end of the Indian campaigns (death of Victoria), the District of the Pecos was dissolved. Given the choice between assignment to Fort Concho or to Fort Davis in 1881, he chose Fort Davis, impressed with its healthful climate. Grierson and the 10th were posted to Arizona in 1885, where he served until his retirement in 1890 at the rank of Brigadier General. By 1891, West Texas was declared safe for settlers and the post of Fort Davis was closed.

But while stationed at Fort Davis, Grierson had purchased land and built Grierson Brothers’ Spring Valley Ranch there for his sons, Charlie, Robert, Harry, and George. With admirable foresight, Grierson attempted to provide an environment in which his sons could live independently despite what Grierson characterized as “this family tendency to Insanity.” Charlie had been hospitalized after his second year at West Point and convalesced for almost a year before he was able to return. He pursued a military career until 1915, when he was institutionalized. Robert, who had been institutionalized while a first year medical student, had run the ranch for a number of years, but was reinstitutionalized in 1890. These two older sons spent the remainders of their lives in institutions, Robert dying in 1922, Charles in 1928.

General Grierson visited his sons at Spring Valley Ranch in Texas six to nine months a year until 1898. He died in Michigan August 31, 1911. His two younger sons, Harry and George, were able to live out their lives at Fort Davis, even, according to George’s obituary, as “prosperous bachelors.” (Harry was divorced.)
In the caption to one of the photographs, Harry is remembered as an excellent marksman, talented in music and painting. He died in Fort Davis in 1934 at the age of 65. George was institutionalized for two years after Harry’s death, but Fort Davis friends petitioned for his release and were successful on the third petition in 1836. George, also a talented musician and Fort Davis resident for 70 years, died November 23, 1950 at the age of 81. For a discussion of the place of music in the Grierson family and at Fort Davis during Colonel Grierson’s command, see the Buchanan thesis listed below. Alice Kirk Grierson, mother of Charles, Robert, Harry, and George, was born in 1828 and died in 1888.

The collection consists of copies of Fort Concho correspondence dating from the General Hancock’s order establishing the District of Texas “for the more complete and efficient protection of the North Western frontier of Texas” to the telegram of June 1, 1882 signed by Grierson; the May 22, 1880 issue of the Concho Daily Times with “Gen’l Grierson” written on it in ink; and two photographs, a caption, fragments of Grierson Brothers business correspondence, and a typescript of a newspaper article.

The originator or originators of most of the assembled documents are unknown. Any or all of the documents may have been collected by members of the West Texas Historical and Scientific Society, which transferred its holdings to Sui Ross State University in 1968. The Concho Daily Times issue was donated to the West Texas Historical and Scientific Society by C. J. Patterson of Cleveland, Ohio in 1939. The correspondence [copies] relating to the defense of West Texas headquartered at Fort Concho between 1868 and 1882 may have originated with Dr. Clifford B. Casey, Sui Ross history professor. Special Order 27 carries the seal of The National Archives.

One of the Society members, Barry Scobee, was a writer and historian of Fort Davis who may have had access to the Grierson brothers’ papers. The Grierson Brothers items may have come to the Archives together in a picture frame. The caption on one photograph names the Shipmans. Alice Jack Shipman was a writer and editor of The Voice of the Mexican Border. It is possible that these materials became separated from her research files in the Alice Jack Shipman collection, also in the Archives.

The papers are arranged in a single oversize archival box in three folders: 1. Fort Concho Correspondence, 2. Concho Daily Times, and 3. Grierson Brothers.

Total leaf count: 14 leaves.

Gaylan Corbin
Archival Assistant
December 20, 1995
REFERENCES

*Buchanan, John Strauss. "Functions of the Fort Davis Military Bands and Musican Proclivities of the Commanding Officer, Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson, Late Nineteenth Century," thesis, SRSU, 1968

*Dinges, Bruce J. "Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson on the West Texas Frontier," paper read at meeting of Texas State Historical Association and the Historical Society of New Mexico, El Paso, Texas, March 6, 1981.

"Grierson Texas Letters" 1874-1888
(A Microfilm 355.104 G848 V.1, V.2) (2 rolls)


*Source for collection summary
1. Fort Concho Correspondence

Special Order 27 establishing Fort Concho, Texas and a line of posts "for the more complete and efficient protection of the North Western frontier of Texas." Major General Hancock by George L. Hartsuff [copy] February 6, 1868 (2 leaves)

Weather station materials list. A. W. Greely to Pvt. W. J. Crandall (?) [copy] October 20, 1875 (1 leaf)

Lease "for the lot on which the U.S.M.T. office at Fort Concho, Texas is situated," Geo. S. Grimes to Private T. W. Milburn [copy] April 2, 1877 (1 leaf)


2. Concho Daily Times. Fort Concho, TX V. 1 n. 9, Saturday, May 22, 1880 (2 leaves)

3. Grierson Brothers

Daily Herald news release: Newly established Military District of West Texas headquartered at Fort Concho will be commanded by Colonel B. H. Grierson [typescript] January 23, 1878 (1 leaf)

Drawings of cattle brands (?) of Chas. H., Robert K., and Benjamin H. Grierson, Jr., 1885 (2 leaves)

Fragment of correspondence on "Grierson Bros., Spring Valley Ranch and Dairy" letterhead, 189_ (1 leaf)

J. L. Jones to Humphries & Co. to confirm charge to General B. H. Grierson account, June 7, 1893 (1 leaf)

B. H. Grierson, sons and soldiers in Davis Mountains, n.d. (1 photograph)

B. H. Grierson, Jr., n.d. (1 photograph)