

BEGINNING OF MILITIA IN WASHINGTON.*

Headquarters, Militia, Washington Territory,
Olympia, Feby. 12, 1855.

Sir:

The legislature of this territory having seen fit to appoint me Brigadier General of the Militia and to devolve upon me in the absence of other appointments the duty of organizing the system, I take the liberty of requesting from you copies of the laws of the State of New York on the Militia, of the regulations adopted by some of the volunteer or uniformed companies for their own government and of the regulations and forms used in your own and other officers of the service, in fact any material which in your opinion will serve to aid in establishing our system upon a good basis and of which you may be able to spare copies.

It is in contemplation to arm such companies as are enrolled on the prairies east of the Cascades as Calvary, probably Mounted Riflemen and those in the forest country of the western side mainly as foot rifles, an arrangement best suited to the character of our country and population. The poverty of the citizens and the sparseness of settlement will prevent our obtaining artillery of which there is great necessity and which otherwise we should introduce as a leading feature. Any suggestions from yourself upon the subject of organization will be very gratefully received, as well as information whether other states have introduced improvements which you think desirable to adopt.

I have the honor to be

Sir your obt. servant,

GEORGE GIBBS.

The Adjutant General of the State of New York.

*Emil Edward Hurje, while searching for early Alaska documents in an old bookstore in New York came upon the following original letter by George Gibbs which he promptly purchased and forwarded to his Alma Mater, the University of Washington. It is one of the first documents relating to militia organization in Washington. George Gibbs was one of the most cultured and effective men who came in contact with the early Northwest. He was born in Sunswick, now Astoria, Long Island, New York, on July 17, 1815, and died in New Haven, Connecticut, on April 9, 1873. His grandfather was Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury for six years, 1795-1801, and his father, George Gibbs, was one of the most famous mineralogists of his day. A brother, Oliver Wolcott Gibbs, was a famous chemist and soldier. George Gibbs was educated as a lawyer but his love of the out-of-doors led him into other fields. He came West during the California gold rush and made his way to the Northwest. He served as geologist on the railroad surveys under Governor Isaac I. Stevens and his reports on geology and also on ethnology contain masses of information, the importance of which is growing with the passing of the years. The letter here published was written during that time of intense activity. He was one of the helpful men at the foundation of the Smithsonian Institution, when it entered the field of ethnology. Aside from its inherent value the letter serves also the good purpose of drawing attention once more to the remarkable career of George Gibbs.