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**Letter Book  
of the  
Arkansas Trading House  
1805-1810**



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**RICHARD NIXON**

*President of the United States*

**ARTHUR F. SAMPSON**

*Acting Administrator of General Services*

**JAMES B. RHOADS**

*Archivist of the United States*

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Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs

Record Group 75

in the National Archives Building

LETTER BOOK OF THE ARKANSAS  
TRADING HOUSE, 1805-1810

On this single roll of microfilm is reproduced one volume of handwritten copies of letters sent and received by the agent of the Arkansas trading house for the entire period of operations from 1805 to 1810.

The Constitution of the United States vested authority in the Congress to regulate commerce with Indian tribes. Between 1795 and 1822 the U.S. Government established and operated a series of trading houses to supply the Indians with manufactured goods in exchange for skins and furs. On March 3, 1795, the Congress appropriated a sum not to exceed \$50,000 for the purchase of goods to be sold to the Indians under the direction of the President (1 Stat. 443). Legislation enacted the following year raised the capital to \$150,000 and authorized the President to establish trading houses on the western and southern frontiers, or in the Indian country (1 Stat. 452). The capital was increased to \$260,000 by an act of April 21, 1806 (2 Stat. 402), and to \$300,000 by an act of March 3, 1809 (2 Stat. 544).

Each trading house was under the immediate charge of an agent appointed specifically to direct commerce with the Indians. The Secretary of War had general supervisory control over the trading houses, but from 1806 to 1822 they were administered by the Superintendent of Indian Trade who was responsible to the Secretary. The trading houses were often referred to as factories, and their agents as factors.

The main intent of the factory system was to foster friendly relations with the Indians by regulating their trade. The prices of goods supplied to Indians at the factories were set to maintain the original capital rather than to secure a profit for the Government. At the same time, private trade with the Indians was still permitted under the licensing system regulated by the Secretary of War and the superintendents and agents serving under him.

The skins and furs obtained from the Indians were shipped to the large cities and sold. The act of 1806 specified that peltries be offered at public auction in different parts of the United States in proportion to the demand of the market. A minimum of six annual public sales were to be held with no more than two in any State for a given year. Subsequent laws repealed these provisions and gave the Superintendent of Indian Trade the option to dispose of the peltries through auction or other means.

The factory system was abolished in 1822, but it took several years to liquidate its affairs.

The Arkansas factory was located at Arkansas Post on the Arkansas River in Louisiana Territory (now the State of Arkansas). On March 15, 1805, John B. Treat was notified that he would be appointed factor, and on September 4, after a 3-month journey from Pittsburg, he arrived at his post. Treat remained in charge of the factory until March 31, 1809, when he turned its affairs over to James B. Waterman in order to take leave of absence because of sickness. Waterman also became ill and relinquished on July 1, 1810, his duties to Samuel Treat, the brother of John Treat. In the meantime, however, the President decided to discontinue the Arkansas factory and Samuel Treat effected its liquidation in the fall of 1810.

The correspondence copied into the letter book reproduced in this microfilm publication was between officials in charge of the Arkansas factory and the Secretary of War; the Secretary of the Treasury; the U.S. Agent at New Orleans; the Principal Agent for Indian Factories and his successor, the Superintendent of Indian Trade; and others. In addition to documenting the trading business at the Arkansas factory, the letter book also contains information about the physical plant, the kinds of goods on hand, the shipment of goods, competition from private traders, and conditions among the Indians. Information about the rivers, climate, and general topography of the region is also contained in the letter book. The arrangement is chronological by date of outgoing letter or by date of receipt of incoming letter.

The letter book reproduced in this publication is part of the records in the National Archives designated as Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75. Microfilm publications containing related records from the same record group are: Letters Sent by the Superintendent of Indian Trade, 1807-1823 (M16); Letters Received by the Superintendent of Indian Trade, 1806-1824 (T58); Letters Sent by the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, 1800-1824 (M15); and Letters Received by the Office of the Secretary of War Relating to Indian Affairs, 1800-1823 (M271).

Records have also been microfilmed for other U.S. Government trading houses: Letterbook of the Creek Trading House, 1795-1816 (M4); and Records of the Choctaw Trading House, 1803-1825 (T500).

Also in Record Group 75 are other records of the Arkansas factory: daybook, 1805-10, journal, 1805-10, ledger, 1805-10, invoice book, 1805-10, and miscellaneous accounts, 1805-10. There is also one volume of letters sent by the Office of the Superintendent of Indian Trade (in liquidation), 1822-30.

These introductory remarks were written by Richard C. Crawford.