In the aftermath of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, the federal government authorized construction of a series of forts to protect settlers on the northwest frontier from any attacks of the Mississippi bands of Ojibwe. The Eighth Regiment of Minnesota Volunteer Infantry, headquartered at Fort Ripley, manned posts at Sauk Centre, Alexandria, Fort Abercrombie, and points in between. This plan of Fort Alexandria details the size of its five sides and the location of offices, barracks, stables, storage buildings, the blacksmith shop, post office, and hotel. The fort encompassed nearly two acres.

Benjamin Wetherill Brunson and Ehud N. Darling of Company K drew this plan in April 1863. Brunson's reminiscences in the Minnesota Historical Society's manuscripts collections state that he arrived at the fort in midwinter 1862–63. The soldiers built “barracks for the men, and stables for the horses, after which we enclosed the whole within a stockade—some ten feet high.” Brunson remained at the fort until May 1864 “doing escort duty thence to Fort Abercrombie with supply trains and U.S. Mails—and elsewhere around the country as circumstance required.” He received orders “to take such number of men as I needed and scour the country around to watch for marauding bands of Indians—never coming in contact with any, [I] have no hair breadth escapes to chronicle.”

Brunson (1823–98), a surveyor, had arrived in St. Paul in about 1847 and laid out many streets in the original capital city townsite. On September 23, 1862, he enlisted as a first sergeant and was assigned to the Eighth Regiment. He served at Fort Alexandria until May 1864, accompanied General Alfred Sully on his Dakota campaign, and then was sent to the Civil War in the South. Afterwards, Brunson returned to St. Paul and participated in business and government ventures until his death.

Darling (1832–1912), also a trained surveyor, arrived in Minnesota Territory in the early 1850s, enlisted in the Eighth Regiment in 1862, was mustered out in 1864, and continued surveying in the southwest and west. In the 1870s he settled in Washington, D.C. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Through the generosity of members and friends of the MHS, this plan was purchased at the January 2010 New York auction of the collection of Floyd E. Risvold.

—Duane P. Swanson, curator of manuscripts
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