A New Hospital and A New Husband

During the Union occupation of Boonville, Thespian Hall served as a hospital. In a Letter from Missouri in the Rock Island Argus, 6th January 1862, the writer who gave only the initials M.S.B. stated: "There are a great many of our soldiers on the sick-list and in the hospital. There are four hospitals in the interior of Missouri, one at Jefferson City, one at St. Louis, one at Otterville and one at Boonville. They are all, and I have visited three of them, well provided for. At Boonville, the hospital (Thespian Hall—ed.) is under the direction of Post Surgeon Henry J. Maynard, and it is the model hospital in Missouri. It is clean and the greatest care is taken for the comfort of the patients. There are in this hospital some 80 or 100 beds and about three times that number are accommodated in the streets."

The Civil War in Boonville

By 1864, the horrors of the Civil War had reached into all families on both sides. Guerrillas and opportunists attacked wherever they sensed easy rewards. Thus, men from both sides formed the Boonville Home Guard (same name as in 1861 but with different ethnic membership) – Germans, Southern, and Unionists – to guard the town and try to protect whatever property was left. They hoped their presence would keep out the bushwhackers and guerrillas. In October 1864 Boonville citizens learned that a force of Confederate soldiers was approaching from the east and realized it was Confederate General Sterling Price and his army, retreating west after losing the pivotal battle of Pilot Knob about two weeks earlier.

The Home Guard erected a barricade across Vine Street just to the south of Thespian Hall. An hour before sundown the Confederates under Brigadier General Joseph O. Shelby came into town. The Home Guard fired one round as the Confederates advanced. Realizing this was going to be hopeless – Price had over 12,000 men under his command, the Home Guards surrendered as prisoners of war. They were then taken to the Cooper County Courthouse and closely guarded by the incoming Confederate troops.

The imprisoned Home Guard troops were marched into the street and lined up in front of either the Courthouse or City Hall. Historic references list both sites. General Price released them on parole under the condition that if they ever took up arms again against the South and were caught, they would be shot. When General Price left, his troops stole horses and supplies and then the Union forces in the area did the same thing so that Cooper County was left destitute, especially of horses. It has been said that “hardly a good one” was left.

Of all the actions taken by Confederate General Sterling Price during his three day stay in Boonville, his meeting with Guerilla leader William Anderson (Bloody Bill) caused the most alarm among Union supporters. Anderson gave Price a set of pearl handled revolvers. Anderson showed up in Boonville with about 100 men including John Pringle. Price ordered Pringle to remove and throw away a “profuse array” of scalps which dangled from his waist. Anderson and his men had spent much of the summer just across the Missouri River in Howard County. Price supposedly told Anderson that if he only had 50,000 men such as him all of Missouri could be held for the Confederacy. This inflamed Union supporters and soon whether it was really said or not no longer mattered. To Federal forces in Missouri, Anderson was the most despised and feared of all the guerilla leaders. Just two weeks before the meeting in Boonville, Anderson led a band of men that massacred Federal troops at Centralia, Missouri. After the encounter in Boonville, Anderson’s band left Boonville, and headed east, on Price’s orders, to destroy the North Missouri Railroad. This raid culminated in the burning of Danville, Missouri, on October 14, 1864. Anderson was killed in ambush at Orrick, Missouri, on October 26, 1864.

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