The Historic Parade Ground

Missouri’s

CIVIL WAR

In 1826, the year of Thomas Jefferson’s death, Jefferson Barracks, named after him, was established ten miles south of St. Louis. Now a Missouri Air National Guard installation, it is the oldest continuously operating U.S. military post west of the Mississippi River. Its central location led to its initial use as a recruiting center and unit training ground.

Troops sent from Jefferson Barracks participated in the Black Hawk War of 1831-1832. The distances involved proved so great that marching infantry were incapable of patrolling them. Mounted infantry became the solution to the problem. In 1833, the United States Regiment of Dragoons (Cavalry) was formed at Jefferson Barracks. Re-designated in 1861 as the 1st Cavalry, by the end of the 19th century the United States Regiment of Dragoons (Cavalry) was centered at the historic parade ground, used continuously by the military for over 180 years.

Jefferson Barracks, then centered at the historic parade ground, saw more future Civil War generals than any other military post in the United States. It has been estimated that at one time or another over 220 Civil War generals were stationed here. These include Union Generals Ulysses S. Grant, William T. Sherman, George H. Thomas, Don Carlos Buell and Philip Sheridan and Confederate Generals Albert Sidney Johnston, Joseph E. Johnston, William Hardee, Earl Van Dorn and Braxton Bragg. Many of the men who occupied senior command positions at Gettysburg served at Jefferson Barracks as young men, notably Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee, James Longstreet, George E. Pickett, Lewis Armistead, John Bell Hood, Richard S. Ewell, Henry Heth and J.E.B. Stuart, and Union Generals Winfield Scott Hancock, John Sedgwick and John Buford.

Confederate President Jefferson Davis served at Jefferson Barracks as young men, notably Confederate Generals Robert E. Lee, James Longstreet, George E. Pickett, Lewis Armistead, John Bell Hood, Richard S. Ewell, Henry Heth and J.E.B. Stuart, and Union Generals Winfield Scott Hancock, John Sedgwick and John Buford.

During the Civil War, the place where you are standing was occupied by buildings that made up the largest military hospital complex west of the Mississippi River. This was the largest of many military hospitals established in St. Louis during the war. St. Louis’s role as a center for military medicine began in August 1861, when casualties of the Battle of Wilson’s Creek near Springfield, Missouri poured into the city. Authorities hastily took over an uncompleted juvenile home near Broadway and Gattenside in south St. Louis to use as a temporary hospital. Then a group of citizens, in cooperation with Union Army Gen. John Fremont formed the Western Sanitary Commission, which established a network of hospitals that included the City Hospital, the federal Marine Hospital (then located off South Broadway), converted hotels, and other buildings. At one time during the war, the St. Louis area had fifteen military hospitals in use.

As the war progressed, a fleet of hospital ships (the world’s first) brought casualties to St. Louis. Wounded men, including captured Confederates, were brought here from the 1862 battles at Ft. Donelson and Shiloh in Tennessee, from Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1862, and from many other encounters along the western rivers.

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Jefferson Barracks also became a convalescent center for wounded Union soldiers.

On your right is the Missouri Civil War Museum, which opened in 2011 in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. The large building you are facing is the historic Jefferson Barracks parade ground, used continuously by the military for over 180 years.

During the American Civil War (1861-1865), the Cherokee, Iowa, Kansas, Mahas, Pawnee, Potawatomi, Osage, Otoe, Sac and Sioux, together with Indian expeditions involving the Cherokee, Iowa, Kansa, Mahas, Pawnee, Potawatomi, Osage, Otoe, Sac and Sioux, became a recruiting center and unit training ground.

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Confederate President Jefferson Davis served at Jefferson Barracks upon his graduation from West Point in 1828 and intermittently at other times during his career in the U.S. Army.

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Sources:

The Western Sanitary Commission, A Sketch of its Origins, History.


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