

The Civil War in Boonville

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 (Illinois) Argus, 08 January 1862', the writer who gives only the initials of M.S.B. states: "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 Syracuse, 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 eighty or an hundred sick, the majority of them merely complaining — not at all



Thespian Hall in 1869

dangerous. I think when you find a man fitted for his place and does his duty promptly he is entitled to more than a mere passing notice, and I shall be doing Dr. Maynard (who by the way is an Illinoisian though surgeon in the Missouri 9th) no more than justice to say that his manner of treating patients and the arrangement of his hospital is worthy of imitation by all others in the service. He is kind, sociable and in every respect a gentleman. The suffering can turn to him with confidence for they are sure to find a friend and sympathizer. He is a young man of great promise and enters upon his business determined to conquer and overcome all obstacles. To give you an idea of the man, I will only relate one little circumstance which happened when he entered the service. He was engaged to be married to a lady in the town of his residence in Illinois, and the nuptial day arrived. At the same time an order came that his regiment wanted his services, as it would move to Missouri. He was married in the evening and the next morning joined his regiment and has not seen his wife since. However, his not seeing her since that time has been no fault of his, for he has asked your humble servant to grant him a leave of absence to visit his

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Missouri's CIVIL WAR

By 1864, the horrors of the Civil War had reached into all families on both sides. Guerillas 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, Southerners, and Unionists — to guard the town and try to protect whatever property was left. They hoped their presence would keep out the bushwhackers and guerillas. 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 westward 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 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 fury 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.



BRIGADIER GENERAL
Joseph O. Shelby

GENERAL
Sterling Price

WILLIAM ANDERSON
"Bloody Bill"

Presbyterian Church Problems

In 1861 the Boonville Presbyterian church hosted a statewide gathering of Presbyterians. Delegates from all over Missouri met in the church's sanctuary located across the street from Thespian Hall, where the current building stands today. The Pastor and many members of the Boonville Presbyterian Church offered a resolution requesting that the national church support the Southern cause. The majority approved the resolution. This action caused delegates favoring the Northern view to march out of the meeting and across the street to Thespian Hall to finish their business. The separation that began in Boonville spread to the national church, which divided into the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Following the war, the southern church was known as the Presbyterian Church in the United States, but the denominations did not reunite until 1983. Then, at the Reunion General Assembly in Atlanta, Georgia, the chalice of the First Presbyterian Church of Boonville was used to start the reunion celebration of Holy Communion because of the significance of the crucial vote that took place across this street in 1861.



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bride, but Gen. Halleck's orders could not be disobeyed, which say, no officer can have a leave of absence, only for great and sufficient rations, and it is fearful that the general would not consider this one of that character. There are but few young men who would have done as the Dr. did, would they?"

Photo credits: Chalice courtesy of Reverend Jeff Martin of the Presbyterian Church; Thespian Hall courtesy of Friends of Historic Boonville.

Source: (1) Thoma, James F., *This Cruel Unnatural War*, 2003, pages 120-122. Castel, Albert and Thomas Goodrich, *Bloody Bill Anderson, the Short, Savage Life of a Civil War Guerrilla* (Stackpole Books, 1998)