

The Bushwhacker



Winter Camps

Library of Congress

Welcome to the Winter issue of *The Bushwhacker*, and it is not misnamed. When Punxsutawney Phil said we were going to have six more weeks of winter, he didn't say it was going to be this cold. I hope everyone has better shelter than the soldiers shown this illustration.

As we approach an entire year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board is hoping we may yet be able to have an in-person meeting before the conclusion of the 2020-2021 Campaign. The prospects of such a meeting wax and wane with every news cycle. I hope everyone who wants and needs it gets the vaccine soon. It would be nice to report in the next issue that life is beginning to return to its pre-pandemic normal.

You can find information about what's going with the Roundtable from our Facebook page, our website, <https://civilwarstlmo.org/> or periodic updates via email.

In addition to the excellent speakers we have each month, the National Civil War Roundtable Congress continues to make available speakers on a variety of topics that you can access through Zoom, Facebook Live, and YouTube. You can find further information about the lecture series and general Roundtable information of interest at: <http://www.cwrtcongress.org/>.

This issue we feature an article by Bob Schultz about an event that is frequently mentioned, but rarely described in any detail – the seizure of the Liberty Arsenal just a few days after the firing on Fort Sumter. Thanks to Bob for sharing this with us.

If you have a family history, Civil War-related article, family photographs (I think we can reproduce those here) that you would be willing to share, please send it to stlcwrt@gmail.com. We have already received some exciting items to be included in future issues. Thanks.

— Jim Erwin —

The Seizure of the Liberty Arsenal – April 20, 1861

By Robert G. Schulz



Liberty Arsenal

Missouri Digital Heritage

The first action of the Civil War in Missouri (other than words) happened at the Liberty Arsenal, Liberty, Clay County, Missouri. The arsenal had been completed in 1839 to service the troops on the western frontier. It consisted of a hollow square of buildings, a three-story officers' building and office, a building for enlisted men, one storehouse, one magazine, three workshops, one armory, two gunsheds and two laboratories.¹

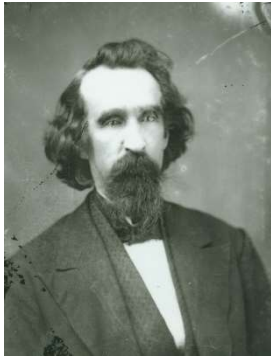
In the 1850 Census, Luther Leonard (age 64) was "Military Storekeeper" in charge of the Arsenal. Living with him were Nathaniel Grant (30) serving as a clerk, Isaac Herman (40) an armorer, and Michael Dixon (24) and Peter Sheridan (22), laborers. Living nearby was Jacob Giros (40), armorer, his wife and two children. In 1852, Grant married Elizabeth Boughton and by 1860 he had become the "Arsenal Superintendent." Living under the same roof was William Madden (22) and his wife.² There is no indication that either Leonard or Grant were military officers, but were, rather, civilian employees of the U. S. Army. Later titles of "Major" and "Colonel" were purely honorary.

On 4 December 1855, about 100 Clay County men led by Major Ebenezer Price surprised Luther Leonard and the arsenal's small staff and looted the Arsenal of three cannon, rifles, pistols and ammunition in support of the "Wakarusa War," a raid against free-state Kansans in support of the Kansas pro-slavery faction in an attack on Lawrence, Kansas. Tempers cooled, the

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberty_Arsenal

² 1850 & 1860 Census information via Ancestry.com

Clay County men returned home and all but about \$400 of the stolen supplies were returned.³



It was the morning of 20 April 1861, and a messenger appeared at the doorstep of Nathaniel Grant, Government Depot-keeper of the arsenal. He carried a note from a Union man living near the river landing. It read substantially: “A company of men from across the river camped in the bottom last night. I understand that another company is at or near Liberty, and that the destination of both is the arsenal. *Look out.* If you want to make a speech, get it ready.”⁴

Speech was the only choice that Grant had. More than 200 men, some mounted, entered the Arsenal and began to empty it of all supplies. Grant was allowed to speak but was greeted with laughter and hoots of derision.

The leader of these secessionists was Colonel Henry L. Routt (above left) a dedicated pro-slavery man originally from Woodford County, Kentucky, where he had been born in 1824.⁵ He moved to Liberty, Missouri, a young, unmarried lawyer; he partnered with another local attorney, Thomas DeCorsey and began his career specializing in criminal law.⁶ He was described as standing 6’ 2” and having red hair and a short temper.⁷ He had married in 1846 and served briefly in the Mexican War.⁸

As he sat in the center of the chaos of the removal of the Arsenal supplies, Depot Manager Nathaniel Grant began to write a letter reporting the event. A letter, not a telegram, and a letter to be carried by boat to St. Louis! The telegraph had reached St. Louis by 1850 and by 1860 had reached Kansas City, Weston and St. Joseph.

MISSOURI DEPOT, Sunday, April 21, 1861.

SIR: I embrace the first opportunity to inform you that the depot was taken yesterday about 10 o’clock by a body of armed men from this and the adjacent counties. While I am writing the depot yard and grounds are filled with men, who are rapidly removing the ordnance and ordnance stores from the Fort. Having no means of resistance, my

³ *WPA Guide to Missouri*, reprint ed. Lawrence, KS. University press of Kansas. 1986. p. 518

⁴ *History of Clay and Platte Counties*. St. Louis, MO. National Historical Company. 1885. p. 196.

⁵ There is some question of his date of birth. 1817 and 1818 also appear in other sources. These dates appear more credible considering his education and legal training in Kentucky.

⁶ Holtman, Chery. *The Life and Times of Henry Louis Routt*. Liberty, MO. Holtman Haus Studios. 2015. P.10.

⁷ *Ibid.* 11.

⁸ *Ibid.* 45-46

protest against the forcible and unlawful seizure of the Public property was of no avail, and I was informed that all the military stores would be taken.

I send this to Saint Louis by boat to be mailed, and so soon as it can be done a detailed report of all the facts, so far as they can be ascertained, will be forwarded.

Very respectfully, I am, sir, your obedient servant,
NATHANIEL GRANT, *In charge of Depot.*

Col. H. K. CRAIG, *Chief of Ordnance, Washington City.*⁹

It is probable that Grant did not trust the area telegraph operators to faithfully send his report. Similarly, he apparently did not trust the local postmaster, since he sent his letter “to St. Louis by boat to be mailed.” A report was telegraphed to Simon Cameron, the Secretary of War, on the same day that Grant wrote his letter. This telegram was sent on 21 April from East St. Louis, possibly because the St. Louis telegrapher could not be trusted.¹⁰

Liberty Arsenal, in Missouri, was taken possession of by secessionists yesterday, and 1,500 arms and a few cannon distributed to citizens of Clay County. The Missouri River is blockaded at Independence. All quiet here at present.

BENJAMIN FARRAR.¹¹

Nathaniel Grant had promised “a detailed report of all the facts,” but none is to be found in the *Official Records*. It is, however found in the *History of Clay and Platte Counties, Missouri*:

MISSOURI DEPOT, April 27th, 1861.

Col. H. K. Craig, Chief of Ordinance, Washington, D. C.:

SIR – On the 21st inst. I informed you – by letter sent to St. Louis by boat to be mailed – that this depot had been seized by armed men from this and adjoining counties, and that the arms, ammunition, etc., were being rapidly removed. The only reason assigned for this act was that

⁹ *Official Records of the Union & Confederate Armies*. Series 1. Vol. 1, 649. Hereafter referred to as *O. R.* Unless otherwise noted, all the *O. R.* references are from Series 1. Most references are from Vol. 3. Notation: *O. R.* 3. 10.

¹⁰ History of telegraphy in St. Louis is to be found in Scharf, J. Thomas. *History of St. Louis City and County*. Philadelphia. Louis H. Everth & Co. 1883. Vol. II. Pp. 1422-1430.

¹¹ *O. R.* 1, 649.

the property was considered essential to the safety of the frontier; and they *assumed* that the State would eventually become responsible for it to the General Government, and they to the state. Having no force to repel them, nor to prevent the removal of the stores, I was compelled to submit.

The post was evacuated by the insurgents to-day, and during the period of their possession they removed all the cannon, gun carriages, caissons, battery wagons, forges, arms, accouterments, implements, ammunition and part of the tools, etc., from the depot. The post was occupied by a force varying from 100 to 200 men during the first three days and was then left under a guard of about 20 men to remove the balance of the stores.

The Union feeling had been so strong in Missouri, and particularly in this county, that I had no apprehension that the post would be disturbed; but it appears that the late telegraphic dispatches from other States produced much excitement among the people, and meetings have been held and Secession flags raised in almost every town during the past week – this state of things being inaugurated by the seizure of the depot.

I understand, however, that this feeling is by no means universal, and that a majority of the citizens here disapprove the seizure of the public property; but this feeling of disapproval being simply negative in its character, is powerless to prevent the violent measures advocated by those holding extreme political views, and the Conservatives, or Union men, who have done their utmost to preserve the peace and the Union, begin to despair, and are of the opinion that the State is fast drifting into the current of secession.

The exact condition of the property at the depot cannot be accurately reported until I can make an inventory of the stores not taken, and this will be done with as little delay as possible. The forcible seizure of the public property in my charge leaves me at a loss how to proceed in the absence of special instructions.

I learn that the property has been distributed through several of the border counties.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obt. servt.,

NATHL. GRANT
In charge of Depot.¹²

The secessionists controlled the arsenal for about a week and, over that time, essentially emptied it of its contents. Arms and ammunition were widely distributed and secreted. Some of the Jackson County men demanded more

¹² *History of Clay and Platte Counties*. St. Louis, MO. National Historical Company. 1885. p. 199.

than their original share and a compromise was reached with the “Cracker’s Neck delegation” avoiding trouble.¹³ Routt’s icehouse in Liberty served as an armory and distribution point to arm secessionists.¹⁴

“The property taken consisted of three six-pounder brass cannon, each weighing 882 pounds, mounted on field carriages; 12 six-pounder iron guns, unmounted; one three-pounder iron gun; five caissons, two battery wagons, two forges, besides all the ordinary artillery equipments and accompaniments, and several hundred rounds of artillery ammunition, chiefly solid shot and canister; 1,180 percussion muskets, complete; 243 percussion rifles, 121 rifle carbines, 923 percussion pistols, 419 cavalry sabers, 39 artillery swords, 20 cavalry and artillery musketoons, 1,000 pounds cannon powder, 9,900 pounds of musket powder, 1,800 of rifle powder, about 400,000 cartridges, besides accouterments and equipments for all small arms in great number, and in excess of the arms taken.”¹⁵

While the arms were distributed via Colonel Routt, the powder barrels were more widely distributed and hidden throughout the region. The looting ceased, and the Liberty Arsenal was no more. Another arsenal, Fort Leavenworth, was nearby and stronger. There was little need for the arsenal and it was essentially abandoned. By 1868, the Liberty Arsenal was put up for sale and disposed of. Today nothing remains on the site but a small plaque.¹⁶

After the Liberty Arsenal raid, Henry Louis Routt was elected Captain of the “Clay County Mounted Rangers,” that had a small involvement at the Battle of Lexington in mid-September 1861. Shortly thereafter, he left his company of rangers and returned to Liberty; accounts vary as to whether he was ill or was deposed by his company. Governor Gamble had pushed for, and succeeded in obtaining, an ordinance allowing amnesty for some secessionists who took an oath of allegiance.¹⁷ In the winter Routt took the oath of allegiance and resumed his law practice. However, as the noose tightened on secessionists in

¹³ “Cracker’s Neck” referred to an area in Jackson County, directly south across the Missouri from Liberty in Jackson County. The name was derived from the fact that many poor white settlers in the area had come from the state of Georgia. (Atchison, Anne. *Place Names of Five West Central Counties of Missouri*. M. A. Thesis. University of Missouri – Columbia. 1937.

¹⁴ *History of Clay and Platte Counties*. St. Louis, MO. National Historical Company. 1885. p. 197.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Poore, B. P. *Message from the President to the Two Houses of Congress at the Commencement of the Third Session of the Fortieth Congress with the Reports of the Heads of Departments*. Washington. Government Printing Office. 1869. 475-477.

¹⁷ *Journal and Proceedings of the Missouri State Convention*, July 1861 pages 137-140. Leopard, Buel & Shoemaker, Floyd. *The Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Missouri*. Columbia, MO. State Historical Society of Missouri. Vol. 3. 516.

Northwest Missouri, Routt's safety was in jeopardy. He was arrested on 17 March 1862 and confined at Liberty. On 18 March 1862, Brigadier General Ben Loan, commanding the Northwest District of the Missouri State Militia at St. Joseph wrote to Brigadier General J. M. Schofield, commanding the Missouri State Militia of his "capture," among others, of Henry L. Routt, "a most notorious rebel and a very desperate man."¹⁸ Schofield wrote back to Loan:

In a letter received a few days ago you spoke of certain influential rebels who obstinately refuse to take the oath and give bond. Send all of that class who are sufficiently influential to do harm to Saint Louis under guard. I will provide them with a comfortable home outside the State.¹⁹

Ben Loan then replied to General Schofield on 25 March 1862 from his Headquarters in St Joseph:

In pursuance of instructions contained in yours of date March 21, 1862, I send to Saint Louis under guard Robert W. Donnell, Israel Landis and William K. Richardson, of this place, and Henry L. Routt and President Thompson, of Liberty. The first three are prominent secessionists here who were committed to jail some time since by the assistant provost marshal for obstinately refusing to give the bond as required by General Halleck's late circular. Among the rebels we have had none more potent for evil than they. I suppose it is not necessary to send the evidence in their cases they having been decided by the provost-marshal here. If I am in error in this I can have it forwarded.

Routt and Thompson were taken at Liberty at the time Colonel Catherwood was there after Quantrill. I do not know whether the evidence has been taken in their cases, but it is not more necessary in Routt's case than it would be in Parsons', Rains', or perhaps General Price's should he be captured. Routt's misdeeds are almost numberless, and I presume he will not pretend to deny them. President Thompson is president of the college at Liberty, a Baptist preacher. I do not know personally of his conduct, but in the public estimation he has done all that it is possible for a man of his very superior abilities and acquirements and of his commanding influence could do for the cause of the rebels, if necessary I can have the evidence sent from Liberty.²⁰

The St. Louis *Missouri Republican* noted on 30 March 1862: "Colonel H. L. Routt, of Clay County, was brought to this city on Friday, and is now in

¹⁸ O. R. Series II, Vol. 1. 271.

¹⁹ O. R. Series II, Vol. 1. 272.

²⁰ O. R. Series II, Vol. 1. 273.

custody, under an indictment for high treason, connected, it is understood, with the seizure of arms of the United States at Liberty Arsenal, and their conversion to the use of the rebel army. He is in very bad health.” Henry Routt was returned to Liberty where his treason trial began in April. Charges against him were:

1st Exciting Rebellion against the United States and endeavoring to induce men to do the same.

2nd Conspiracy to levy war against the United States

3rd Levying War against the United States

4th Making violent assaults against men known to be Union men, to terrify and intimidate them.²¹

After considerable testimony, he was found guilty and sentenced to hang. But other factors began to come into play. Governor Gamble had issued a lengthy proclamation on 3 August 1861 in which he stated:

“If those citizens, who, at the call of the late Governor, have taken up arms, choose to return voluntarily to their homes, to the peaceful pursuit of their occupations, they will find in the present Executive the determination to afford them all the security in his power, and there is no doubt entertained that they will be unmolested.”²²

Even before Rout’s trial began, second thoughts arose at the State Militia Headquarters in St. Louis. On 2 April 1862, C. W. Marsh, the Assistant Adjutant General wrote Ben Loan:

Evidence having been brought to the commanding general that Mr. H. L. Routt, of Liberty, was promised by General Prentiss that if he would sign a pledge to remain at home a law-abiding citizen he should not be subject to arrest and that he did give such pledge to Major James at Liberty on 1st of February last he desires that you send to him the charges against Mr. Routt and the names of witnesses.²³

On 4 April 1862, the U. S. District Attorney in St. Louis, James O. Broadhead, a strong Union supporter and friend to many in Washington, wrote Edward Bates, the Attorney General and a Missourian who understood the situation in his home state.

²¹ Holtman. 72-91,

²² Leopard, 516.

²³ O. R. Series II, Vol. 1. 275.

The spring term of the United States circuit court is now approaching, and I write to obtain from you an official letter making some suggestions or rather giving some instructions as to the course which ought to be pursued by the civil authorities here concerning those who have been indicted either for treason or conspiracy. There is no doubt but that the amnesty held out by the governor under the direction of the convention has induced many to return sincerely to their allegiance and this may and doubtless does embrace some who have been indicted. There are some cases where they have returned and taken the steps prescribed by the military authorities and in those cases an effort to enforce the criminal code might materially interfere with the military arrangements and produce disturbances where there would otherwise be quiet.

Of course, it would not do to lay down any general rule, but each case must more or less be governed by its own peculiar circumstances. Nevertheless, I would like to know what the general policy of the Government is so that I may be governed by it during the ensuing term of the court.²⁴

On 10 April, Bates replied to Broadhead with circumspection but favored Governor Gamble's proclamation.

In answer to your letter of April 4 received yesterday it does not seem politic for me to give you at this critical moment when great changes are being made in our military and political relations with the revolted States any minute and particular instructions touching the prosecutions for treason and for conspiracy now pending in the U. S. circuit court at Saint Louis. Much must be left to your own wise discretion. A few points however may be properly stated, and first Governor Gambles amnesty must be respected and made effectual. Besides that, it is right in itself. I understand that the President is personally pledged to it. Second, it is not desirable to try many treason cases nor any one in which you have not a great probability of success. Better enter a *nolle prosequi* than be beaten. And in view of the great changes now taking place I am in no hurry to press the trial indictments for treason. After a few more military successes we may see the way of prudence more clearly. As to minor offenses such as conspiracy, plunder of public property, obstruction of the mails and the like you must judge for yourself.

P. S. While writing the above your other letter of April 4 touching the case of Henry L. Routt was handed me. Does not that case fall within Governor Gamble's amnesty? My first impression is that it is a proper case for pardon but as I have barely read your letter and that of Mr.

²⁴ O. R. Series II, Vol. 1. 275.

Samuels I must take a little time to consider. If my final conclusion concurs with my first thought it will cause the pardon to be issued very soon.²⁵

On 16 April 1862, Abraham Lincoln signed Henry Routt's pardon and he was freed.²⁶ Routt went on to serve in Liberty both as an attorney and, in 1863, the City Attorney for three years.²⁷ Henry L. Routt died February 23, 1881 and was buried in the Fairview Cemetery in Liberty.²⁸

Nathaniel Grant stayed in Liberty (actually, Liberty Landing on the Missouri River) and was listed as a witness in Routt's trial for treason. However, his testimony is not recorded in the Holtman book. He was still in Liberty in 1866 when he signed a Loyalty Oath.²⁹

With the closure and abandonment of the Arsenal, Grant moved to Kansas City in 1868. The 1872 Kansas City Directory lists him as a partner in Long, Grant & CO., bankers. Then, in 1880, he was appointed Comptroller for the City of Kansas City, a position he held until his death in 1887.³⁰

²⁵ O. R. Series II, Vol. 1. 277.

²⁶ Holtman. 91.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 93.

²⁸ <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/12001/henry-louis-routt/photo>

²⁹ <http://www.civilwaronthewesternborder.org/content/examination-nathaniel-grant> [The original is owned by William Jewell College in Liberty.]

³⁰ https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/26370666/person/26218106823/media/87752921-2de0-4217-9c93-792212e8cfe2?_phsrc=fEO162&_phstart=successSource