

# Missouri History through the Art of Our State Capitol

Written by Bob Priddy

## Civil War

*"This means war."*

*Three words that took two seconds or less to say by Union Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon ended a June 11, 1861, conference in St. Louis with Missouri Governor Claiborne F. Jackson and his military aide, former governor Sterling Price. The two had hoped to convince Lyon to withdraw United States troops from Missouri. In return, Jackson promised to disband his state militia.*

*But Jackson had advocated Missouri joining with southern states that were forming a confederacy, and Lyon knew Jackson's proposal would not leave Missouri as neutral territory but would*



George Washington Carver was born a slave during the Civil War. William J. Williams captures the spirit of a man who grew to be a world famous scientist whose discoveries continue to benefit all of us. Located in the Hall of Famous Americans on the third floor of the state Capitol. Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

instead allow "secret and subtle measures" supporting the South. Lyon refused to let the state dictate conditions to the federal government.

**Jackson and Price returned to Jefferson City** that evening. That night, Jackson called for thousands of soldiers to repel an invasion of Missouri by the federal government and left Jefferson City, never to return.

**A few days later, Union troops moved into Jefferson City** and occupied it for the rest of the war. Remaining members of a special convention called to decide if Missouri should secede — the convention saw no reason to do so — re-convened, declared the governor's office vacant and appointed Hamilton Gamble as acting governor. Lyon's union forces overwhelmed the confederate state militia at Boonville and pursued the southern troops as they headed toward Arkansas.

**The first major battle of the Civil War west of the Mississippi was at Wilson's Creek**, south of Springfield, on Aug. 10, 1861, the 40th anniversary of Missouri statehood. Price's troops, supplemented by confederate soldiers from Arkansas, outnumbered Lyon's troops two-to-one. The fierce six-hour battle cost Lyon his life and left 2,500 soldiers from both sides killed, wounded or missing. Although the Confederates won the battle, they were left so weakened they could not follow the Union army's retreat.



N. C. Wyeth's mural on the southeast mezzanine of the second floor captures the intensity of the Battle of Wilson's Creek, a deadly battle fought on the 40th anniversary of Missouri statehood. Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

**The Confederate troops marched north and captured Lexington** but had to retreat in the face of a large union army sent out from St. Louis. By 1862, Jackson and Price were in Arkansas, running a government in exile. Jackson died in 1862, and the Confederate capital of Missouri eventually was in Texas.

**The South never could regain control of Missouri** after those early successes. The Confederate cause for most of the remaining years of the war was carried by guerillas, or "bushwhackers" as they were called, such as William Clarke Quantrill, "Bloody Bill" Anderson and George Todd, who led raids known for their brutality. Union soldiers countered with brutal responses. Towns were burned, civilians and soldiers alike were massacred. The last organized Confederate effort to reclaim Missouri ended with the Battle of Westport in 1864.



Frank Blair confronts critics who threatened to kill him if he spoke against the loyalty oath in Louisiana, Mo. One of four murals by Richard E. Miller located in the Missouri Senate. Courtesy of Missouri State Archives

**Some numbers tell part of the story** of Missouri's division and Missouri's suffering. Sixty percent of the Missouri men eligible for military service fought for one side or the other, a figure unmatched by any other state. Missouri sent 110,000 troops to the United States Army, of which 14,000 were killed. Forty-thousand

Missourians served with the Confederate Army, an estimated 5,000 of whom died in battle.

**Missouri counted more than 1,200 battles** and skirmishes. Only Virginia and Tennessee had more. The war's end did not end the killing in Missouri. Bushwhackers and outlaws who had tasted violence for the first time during the war wrote bloody new chapters in our history for more than two decades afterwards.

**Many of those battle sites** are state or national historic sites today, peaceful reminders that once there was a time when Missouri was a terrible killing ground.

Bob Priddy is a veteran Missouri Capitol reporter and co-author of "The Art of the Missouri Capitol: History in Canvas, Bronze and Stone."

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