

Disposition of Missouri State Gunpowder at the Beginning of the Civil War

James E. McGhee, ed., *Service With the Missouri State Guard: The Memoir of Brigadier General James Harding* (Springfield, MO: Oak Hills Publishing, 2000), 17-18. "Orders had been given to have the powder, which was stored at the fairgrounds, about one mile from town, hauled out and distributed through the country. Powder was hidden in various places, and much of it was afterwards recovered by the Federal authorities. The possession of the powder thus recovered was the source of much trouble to the parties in whose care it had been left. Much of the greater portion of powder, however, was safely carried away, and formed the supply of that necessary article for the Missouri State Guard throughout the campaign of 1861."

History of Saline County, Missouri (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Co., 1881), 280-281. "The 'Kelly Powder': In the summer and early fall of 1861, a circumstance occurred which was of some importance to Gov. Jackson's troops, and interested many of the citizens of Saline county.

Before the battle of Boonville, and just previous to the abandonment of Jefferson City by Gov. Jackson with the state troops and government, 12,000 kegs of gunpowder were sent off from the capital by boat, and from there scattered in wagons through the counties of Cooper, Saline, etc., and there secreted by a detachment under Capt. Kelly of the State Guards. The powder belonged to the state, and about one-half of it was secreted on different farms in Saline, where it remained concealed until it gradually collected by Missouri soldiers, nearly all of it passing finally into the service of the Confederacy. It was concealed on the farms in every imaginable way, and in curious and unique places, for it was necessary to baffle not only the search of Federal soldiers, but also the keen and indefatigable curiosity of the Negro slaves, then on every farm, and who were continually on the watch, and prompt to report every suspicious movement of their masters. The hiding had to be accomplished in the "wee small' hours," when ever the Negroes were generally asleep. As an instance – ex-Senator Parsons, of Miami, successfully concealed about thirty kegs of this powder in his hog-pen, in a corner of it where he had prepared a sort of bed for the hogs, and under this hog-bed of straw and fodder the thirty kegs of powder were buried. It would be impossible to give the names of all those who received and concealed the powder, and it would require volumes to describe the different methods by which they all effected its concealment. In a few rare cases it was discovered by the Negroes and reported, but those cases were very few.

At the battle of Lexington much of this powder was used in compelling the surrender of the gallant Col. Mulligan and his men. Indeed, it proved very serviceable and "handy to have around" on many occasions."

History of Carroll County, Missouri (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Co., 1881), 298. "...large quantities of this powder was brought to the county by steamer, landed at Hill's Landing, and placed in what were supposed to be safe places. Some of it was held in hemp shacks, some of it in cellars."

History of Cole, Moniteau, Benton, Miller, Maries and Osage Counties, Missouri (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing, 1889), 555 "Meanwhile Gov. Jackson's powder had been largely secreted throughout Miller County at the time of the great fright at the capital....The powder

was found piled up in the court house, where a small iron cannon was also secured.....Powder was found in houses, barns, cellars and caves....”

History of Greene County, Missouri (St. Louis: Western Historical Co., 1883), 284. “Gov. Jackson sent a quantity of powder to Linn Creek, from which point it was distributed throughout southwest Missouri to the “State Guard” and armed secessionists. Greene County’s share was brought to Springfield via stage coach, and hidden in Campbell’s barn from where some of it found its way into the powder horns and cartridge boxes of the State Guards, but the most of it was captured by Federal troops.”

Return I. Holcombe, *History of Marion County, Missouri* (Marceline, MO: Walsworth Publishing Co., 1979. Reprint of 1884 edition.), 374. “About 300 kegs of this powder were sent up to Marion County, arriving at Hannibal. About the middle of May quite a number of kegs were brought to Palmyra, escorted by a considerable company in charge of Harry R. Mills. The powder was taken to the calaboose for safe keeping, and from here it made its way at night into all parts of the county, and much of it finally got into the powder-horns and cartridge-boxes of the Missouri State Guard...”

Ai Edgar Asbury, *My Experiences in the War, 1861-1865* (Kansas City: Berkowitz & Co., 1894), “I was requested by Gov. Jackson to bear the commissions of the appointment of Judge James H. McBride, of Texas county, to the command of the 5th (sic) Division as Brigadier General of the State Guard, together with blank commissions for his staff officers, and also entrusted with three large wagonloads of powder to be conveyed to him a hundred and twenty miles south of Jefferson City. Teams were hired for the purpose, and large covered wagons; the powder was in kegs, halt barrels and barrels, with some boxed in tin cans. The rough and stony flint roads racked, bursted and broke the packages so that it was constantly streaming and leaking the powder along the road so that it was a very hazardous undertaking and kept us watching and frightened all the way; in fact in going down the hills we were compelled to keep our wheels unlocked for fear of a grand explosion and destruction of all our powder and ourselves; three drivers, Wood Rodgers, W. H. H. Thomas and myself, as guards and managers of the expedition. Also we were constantly in danger of being molested by the Union men; so dangerous was the risk that Rodgers and Thomas left me with the wagons and hurried to their homes, thus leaving me in sole charge and danger of the expedition. I was so intent on accomplishing the safe delivery of the powder to the General that I did not fully realize the danger to which I was exposed, not only the danger of explosion, but the eminent danger of being captured and killed by the Union people, who were plentiful through the country. However, we safely delivered the powder at the rendezvous of the 5th (sic) Division. After doing so and reflecting on the risks we ran, my hair literally stood out straight on ends.”

Gentlemen: I saw your posts on the MO CW Message Bd re the removal of the powder from Jeff City in the spring of '61.

I have several references to the removal. You are both familiar with the reference to "Kelly's Powder" in the History of Saline County. According to a memoir of one of Kelly's men, the company spent time distributing the powder after its arrival in Jeff with the powder and before the capital was vacated. Thus I would say that Capt Joseph Kelly is the one referred to in

the History of Saline. I think it was delivered to Cooper County some time before the battle there on 17 Jun.

While I haven't looked at all of the county histories, I have found that some of the powder ended up in Miller, Phelps, Camden, Greene, Cooper, Carroll and Marion Counties. I imagine it was in fact distributed just about anywhere that Jackson, et al, thought it would be useful to his adherents.

JEM

References Relative to the Powder at Jefferson City and its Distribution.

The powder was purchased, some by force of arms, by BG James Harding in St. Louis. Transported to Jefferson City under the supervision of Capt. Joseph Kelly's company of the MO Volunteer Militia, the Washington Blues, and other volunteer militiamen.. James E. McGhee, ed., *Service With the Missouri State Guard: The Memoir of Brigadier General James Harding* (Springfield, MO: Oak Hills Publishing, 2000), pp. 12, 17-18.

A good account of the transport of the powder to Jefferson City is in Michael E. Banasik, ed., *Missouri Brothers in Gray: The Reminiscences and Letters of William J. Bull and John P. Bull* (Iowa City, IA: Camp Pope Bookshop, 1998), pp. 6-8.

A St. Louis militiaman, J. H. McNamara, noted that two companies of the MO Volunteer Militia (Kelly's and Basil Duke's) left St. Louis (Camp Jackson) on May 7, 1861, and proceeded to Jefferson City for garrison duty. He also recalled "The removal of a large quantity of powder, brought up from St. Louis by steamer a few weeks previous, and other military stores from the capital to various points in the state for safety and future use was the work of a few weeks." McNamara's account also describes the march to Boonville by Kelly's company, and its departure on a steamboat after the MSG was defeated. J. H. McNamara, "An Historical Sketch of the Sixth Division, Missouri State Guard, From its Organization in 1861....." Mosby Monroe Parsons Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, MO.

A Hiram Wilcoxson was sent by Carroll County to Jefferson City to procure arms, etc., for the secession militia units that were being organized. He obtained a large quantity of powder which was placed on a steamer. The powder was unloaded at Hill's Landing and distributed throughout the county and stored in "safe" places such as cellars, hemp shacks, etc. *History of Carroll County, Missouri*, p. 298.

Some of the government powder, and a small iron cannon, was sent to Miller County. Some of it was stored at the local courthouse, and much was hidden about the county in houses, barns, cellars and caves. Some of it was found and used by the Osage Regiment of E.M.M. *History of Cole, Moniteau, etc.*, p. 555.

A quantity of the powder was sent to Linn Creek (Camden County) and from there distributed to State Guard units throughout southwest Missouri. A share was forwarded to Greene County by stage coach and hidden in the Campbell barn. The State Guard got some of it, but most of it was captured by Federal troops. *History of Greene County, Missouri*, p. 284.

About 330 kegs of powder were sent to Hannibal in Marion County. About the middle of May a sizeable number of kegs were taken to Palmyra and stored in the local jail. From Palmyra the powder was distributed throughout the county to State Guard units. *History of Marion County, Missouri*, p. 374.

“Before the battle of Booneville, and just previous to the abandonment of Jefferson City by Gov. Jackson with the state troops and government, 12,000 kegs of gunpowder were sent off from the capital to Booneville by boat, and from there scattered in wagons throughout the counties of Cooper, Saline, etc., and there secreted by a detachment under Capt. Kelly of the State Guards.” About one-half hidden in Saline County. Much of the powder was used at the battle of Lexington. *History of Saline County, Missouri*, pp. 280-281.

An account of hauling some of the powder in wagons some 120 miles south of Jefferson City is found in Ai Edgar Asbury, *My Experiences in the War 18161-1865, A Little Autobiography* (Kansas City: Berkowitz & Co., 1894), pp. 3-4.

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