



The walking tour of the
St. Louis Arsenal
at NGA West





Photos courtesy of National Archives and the NGA Office of Corporate Communications.



In 1803, the United States acquired the Louisiana Territory from France. The War Department soon established Fort Belle Fontaine on the Missouri River, four miles from its confluence with the Mississippi River. Fifteen miles north of St. Louis, the fort served as a trading post for Native Americans and a jumping off point to the West. Lewis and Clark and Zebulon Pike passed through the area on their expeditions west. During the War of 1812, it served as a staging area for Army operations in present-day Wisconsin.

By 1825, the stockade's wooden buildings had so decomposed that Fort Belle Fontaine was abandoned in favor of a new military post. In 1826, the new barracks was named in honor of the recently deceased Thomas Jefferson, and the War Department also established an additional, separate US Arsenal in the St. Louis area.

When construction on the new arsenal was completed in 1827 (located at 2nd and Arsenal Streets in present-day St. Louis), Fort Belle Fontaine was shuttered. The new arsenal fronted the Mississippi River and was three miles south of then-St. Louis. It assumed responsibility for sustaining the regular Army and territorial militias west of the Mississippi.

Upon completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, it became possible to travel by water from New York City to the Great Lakes, opening a new and economical route for settlers moving west. The St. Louis Arsenal supplied the regular Army and militia as they provided the only robust governance and security for pioneers using the new route.

In 1828, the arsenal began to manufacture and repair small arms and gun carriages. The first recorded shipment of ordnance arrived in 1829, consisting of 12,000 six-pound and 3,000 twelve-pound cannon balls.

By 1833, twenty-nine soldiers and civilians composed a work force repairing small arms, fabricating ammunition, preserving military stores, and supplying the Army and territorial militias. By 1834, expenditures at St. Louis Arsenal exceeded fifteen of the other seventeen arsenals in the US.

The St. Louis Arsenal provided materiel for the 1832 Black Hawk War, and in 1836 its supplies supported the Army again in Florida's Second Seminole War.

In the 1840s, the arsenal underwent its first major surge. During the Mexican-American War (1846–1848), employment jumped from a corporal's guard to 517 workers. At the same time, the arsenal outfitted major western expeditions such as Fremont's 1843 expedition to the Pacific.

In the 1850s, the arsenal outfitted pioneers heading west with weapons and ammunition at cost. It also equipped the troops sent to protect them with small arms converted from flintlock to percussion and rifled musket barrels. These upgrades of rifling and percussion caps added to lethality and stand-off distances.

The Civil War unfolded with Lincoln's election in 1860. The St. Louis Arsenal, located in a volatile border state, was a prized asset. By 1861, it was the most well-known arsenal in the US after Harper's Ferry.

Missouri, with its pro-Confederate and pro-Union factions, experienced the larger national Civil War writ small. There were two state governments and two armies. If Missouri seceded, the arsenal and control of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers might threaten the Northern cause.

At conflict's onset in April 1861, Missouri's pro-secessionist Governor Claiborne Jackson planned to seize St. Louis Arsenal for use by Missouri and the Confederacy.

Lincoln's Postmaster General, Montgomery Blair and his brother, St. Louis Congressman Francis Blair, were ardent Missouri Unionists. Anticipating armed conflict, Frank Blair outfitted members of his pro-Lincoln Union Clubs along military lines. Blair's ally was Nathaniel Lyon, a Connecticut-born abolitionist and commander of US Arsenal St. Louis.

Aware of Governor Jackson's intent, Captain Lyon shipped about 21,000 small arms and 110,000 cartridges upriver to Illinois for safekeeping. Seven thousand muskets remained at the arsenal to equip Union partisans.

During this period, pro-secessionists gathered at Camp Jackson on the west side of St. Louis. In May 1861, these pro-secessionists received arms from the seized US Arsenal in Louisiana.

Lyon marched on Camp Jackson with overwhelming force and accepted the surrender of the pro-secessionist party. Lyon's prisoners were marched through St. Louis to the arsenal. In the process, Southern sympathizers and Union guards scuffled. Gunfire broke out, and twenty-eight people from both sides died. Gaining the arsenal, Lyon paroled the prisoners. The arsenal and the city were never again threatened during the Civil War.

Promoted to brigadier general, Lyon moved into western Missouri to blunt Rebel incursions from Arkansas, as well as Governor Jackson's pro-Southern troops within Missouri. In fighting at Wilson's Creek, Lyon became the first federal general officer killed in combat.

Secured for the North, the arsenal's importance grew during the war. With a garrison of 12,000 troops, its original mission of storing, outfitting, and repairing continued unabated. By 1863, 700 workers were employed.

In 1865, the US Arsenal in Rock Island, Illinois assumed many functions of the St. Louis Arsenal, with the latter gradually used as a storage depot for surplus materiel.

2 St. Louis Arsenal

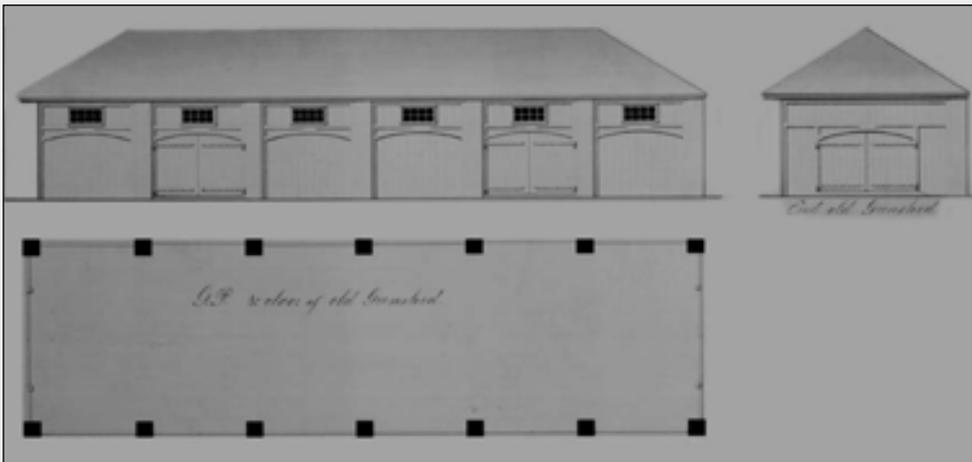
In 1868, Congress recommended that the arsenal be collocated with Jefferson Barracks, and the War Department authorized the arsenal's sale. However, no land was sold and by 1869, most of the ordnance had been moved to other posts. In 1870, the arsenal garrison consisted of about fifty soldiers. More importantly, the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 eliminated the need for both westbound wagon trains and a St. Louis arsenal to arm settlers.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the arsenal was folded into Jefferson Barracks, which the War Department transferred to the Ordnance Department. The War Department granted St. Louis some of the arsenal property for a public park honoring Brigadier General Nathaniel Lyon, the man who saved Missouri and the St. Louis Arsenal for the Union.

Over the next decades, a variety of Army tenants served on the arsenal's grounds. In 1952, the facility transferred to the Air Force and at that time, the Aeronautical Chart Service moved from downtown St. Louis to the arsenal. As the mission grew, the name was changed to the Aeronautical Chart and Information Center (ACIC). In turn, ACIC was subsumed by other agencies, including the Defense Mapping Agency in 1972, and then National Imaging and Mapping Agency in 1996. The latter became the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) in 2003.

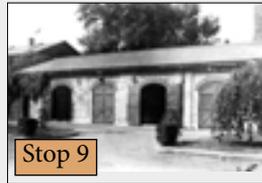
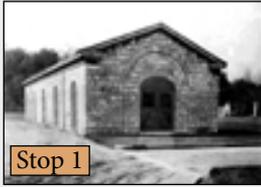
Thus for almost two centuries the St. Louis Arsenal played a key role in American history, from the westward expansion, to the Civil War, continuing through two world wars, and now providing a western base of operations for NGA.

Twenty-two acres of the original arsenal were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975.



Courtesy NARA

A Walking Tour of the St. Louis Arsenal at NGA West



The St. Louis Arsenal Grounds : NGA West



Stop 1 – Visitor Center



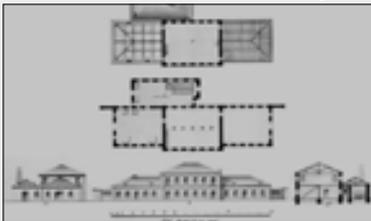
Courtesy NGA History Office

This structure was built by enlisted personnel of the arsenal. Designed as a companion to Building 2, it measured 27 x 83 feet and was used to store coal for fueling the equipment of the arsenal's armory. During the Civil War, the structure was converted to storage of ammunition. The building plans were signed by Major William H. Bell, Arsenal Commander from 1840 to 1851.

Stop 2 – Buildings 4 and 5: Armory Building

Buildings 4 and 5 formed the north and south wings of the original armory building, constructed in 1830 through 1834. Built of limestone with a slate roof, the structure consisted of a central section, two stories high and measuring 44 x 58 feet, which was flanked on the northeast and southwest by one-story workshops of 40 x 48 feet. The wings housed the carpenter and blacksmith shops. The central structure, which housed the steam-driven machinery of the arsenal, was damaged by fire in 1865. The wings were rebuilt with some alterations. Building 5 became a guardhouse and jail when the post was a cavalry recruit depot (1873–1879). The flag pole is in what was the central section of the building and was dedicated January 17, 1975, when twenty-two acres and ten buildings of the original arsenal were added to the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district. Building 4 is currently used for the offices of the NGA Inspector General, West. Building 5 houses the arsenal credit union.

Courtesy NARA



Courtesy NGA History Office



Courtesy NGA History Office

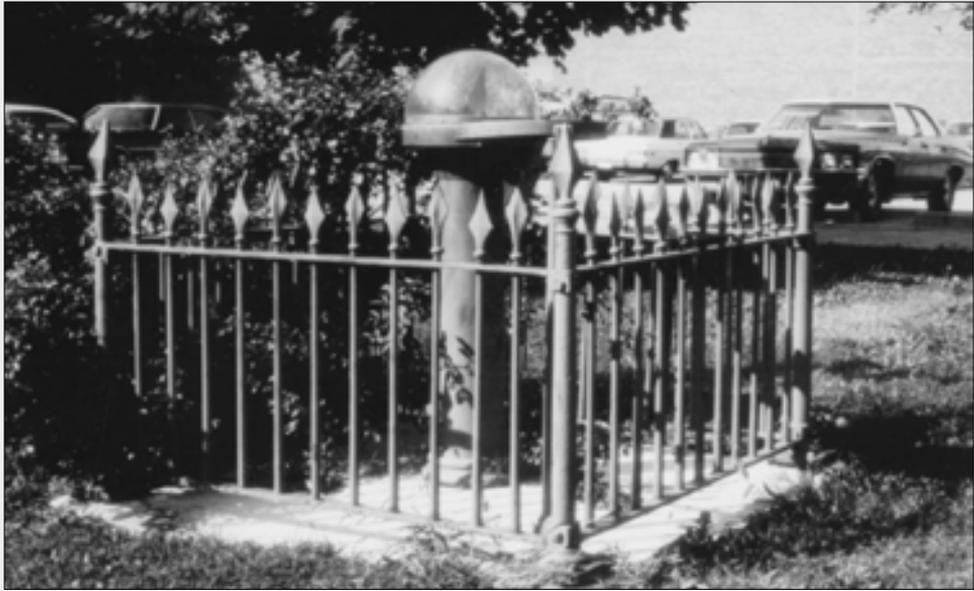
Stop 3 – Building 12 and Parade Grounds



Courtesy NGA History Office

Buildings 12 and 18 are on opposite sides of the parade grounds. Originally, Building 12 was a two-story structure, completed in 1830. It measured 21 x 49 feet. Each of its two floors housed one large room. At the center of the present structure was another building, which was the post hospital. The third section, on the west, was a one-story building completed in 1837 and used as a lumber storehouse. The east and west sections were joined in 1919, after the middle building was razed—it had faced north and south. The building is currently used as the human resources office.

Stop 4 – Sun Dial and Time Capsule



Courtesy NGA History Office

The sun dial and the surrounding fence were fabricated by arsenal personnel and dedicated on December 12, 1859. It displays the range of skills in practical arts and sciences possessed by arsenal craftsmen. Created entirely from spare ordnance materials, the sun dial was a scientifically precise instrument, measuring 17 inches in diameter. It was used for many years as the definitive chronometer of the arsenal. Engraved upon it was the poem “The Bird of Liberty,” reflecting the patriotic fervor of the day. Although the brass face has been much worn by years of polishing and weathering, many details of its original ornate engraving are still visible. The fence pickets are musket barrels; the corner posts are small cannons.

Near the sun dial is a time capsule put in place by Defense Mapping Agency Aeronautical Center personnel when the agency was reorganized to form the National Imagery and Mapping Agency in 1996.

Also in this same area is a disk, which marks a gravity point used to determine the exact geographical location of points on the Earth.

Stop 5 – Schauer Building



Courtesy NGA History Office

Also known as Building 36, the Schauer Building is the headquarters building for NGA West. Built in 1918 as a warehouse for the Army Quartermaster Corps, it has been modified to meet specific requirements for its many tenants. One wing was added in the 1960s and another in the 1980s to accommodate cartographic equipment.

The building was named for Colonel Paul C. Schauer, who commanded the Aeronautical Chart and Information Center, one of NGA's predecessors, from March 1, 1949 to May 5, 1952. He is credited for moving the headquarters of ACIC from Washington, DC to St. Louis in 1952. Col. Schauer was killed in an airplane accident near Cowpens, South Carolina on January 11, 1954. The Schauer Building was dedicated on June 8 of that year.

Stop 6 – Lumber Storehouse



Building 18 began as three buildings: a storehouse, an office building in the center, and a one-story lumber storehouse. Dates for construction and remodeling are the same as for Building 12. The original Building 18 measured approximately 30 x 50 feet. It was intended to be a carriage maker's shop, but was found unsuitable for this and was converted for use as a storehouse. The original middle building, also two stories in height, was headquarters for the arsenal's storekeeper, and later quarters for enlisted men. A third building, on the west, was a lumber storehouse. Building 18 is now the installation engineering office. This view of the rear of Building 18 shows the meticulous detail of the 1830 stonework on the original carriage maker's shop.

Stop 7 – Storehouse and Stable



Courtesy NGA History Office

Built as a timber storehouse in 1853, this structure had open bays covered with wooden slat sides and was supported by fourteen pairs of fifteen-inch brick columns. Used to store timber until 1871, it later became a warehouse and was sometimes used as an extra stable. The slat siding was replaced with brick in about 1892. In the 1950s, after the site was occupied by the Air Force, it was one of several buildings extensively renovated to create additional office space. A more recent renovation, completed in 1994, restored the south entrance design and ornamentation. It is currently used to house the western division of the graphics and visual communications section of the NGA Office of Corporate Communications.

Stop 8 – Artillery Arsenal



Courtesy NGA History Office

Built between 1849 and 1850, the structure originally had three stories and was designed to store up to 192 artillery carriages. Made of brick, its approximate dimensions were 67 x 104 feet. It continued to be used as an artillery arsenal until the post was converted to a cavalry recruit depot in 1871. It is believed that it was used as a barracks between 1871 and 1879. It was later converted to a warehouse. In the 1950s, the first floor was used as a cafeteria, while the upper floors housed a variety of training facilities. Later in the decade, a tornado damaged the top two floors. In 1993, an extensive restoration of the remaining structure was completed, recreating the arched windows, medallions, sloped roof, and other features of the original.

Stop 9 – Storehouse



Courtesy NCA History Office

Built in 1830, Building 2 consisted of two bays. The west side was for coal storage and the center bay housed the fire engine. The remainder of the structure was the paint shop. During the Civil War, it was used for storing small-arms ammunition. A greenhouse, built in 1919, was removed in the 1950s.

Stop 10 – NGA Museum



Courtesy NGA History Office

The NGA Museum is located in the Commander's House, built in 1907. The commander preferred to live at Jefferson Barracks with his troops; by 1916, the structure was office space for the quartermaster. The house has three floors and a basement. Nine fireplaces are original to the house. The museum opened in September 2005.

The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency

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