



U.S. ARMY

# THE ASC HISTORY NEWSLETTER

Volume 12 Issue 9 SE

June 2022



## COMMEMORATING ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL'S 160TH ANNIVERSARY



### THIS MONTH in MILITARY HISTORY

### Prominent Figures at Rock Island

- 1898 2 The "Rough Riders" being their landing at Daiquiri, Cuba.
- 1903 1 Douglas MacArthur graduates from the U.S. Military Academy and is commissioned.
- 1916 2 American Expeditionary Forces clash with federal Mexican forces at Carrizal.
- 1942 9 The Battle of Midway results in a decisive and game-changing American victory.
- 1943 2 The Tuskegee Airmen fly their first combat mission near Tunisia.
- 1944 9 The D-Day Invasion, as the Allies make their first gains in France.
- 1965 7 GEN Westmoreland submits his request for 44 battalions deployed to Vietnam.
- 1991 8 A victory parade is led through Washington D.C. following Operation *Desert Storm*.
- 2003 16 Abid Hamid Mahmud al-Tikriti, Saddam's right hand, is captured by British forces.
- 2006 7 Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Osama bin Laden's replacement, is killed in Iraq.

Rock Island Arsenal, and Arsenal Island has many storied individuals that have graced its history. Some were just simply passing through, while others lived and worked on the island. From the establishment of the Arsenal in 1862 to present, this installation has been known for its familial legacy and generational workforce. Everyone contributed and continues to contribute a significant amount to the history of Rock Island Arsenal. The list of the greatest influencers could easily fill an entire book, but instead we will look at a few of the most prominent individuals from Fort Armstrong through the Interwar.



COL George Davenport

Perhaps the most well-known individual in Rock Island Arsenal history aside from BG(B) Thomas J. Rodman is COL George Davenport, a sutler who worked for the U.S. Army during the Fort Armstrong years. Together with Antoine Leclair, the two were the first major businessmen to settle in the region that now makes up the greater Quad Cities. Davenport served as the main negotiator for the U.S. Army and the local Sauk and Fox tribes, providing trading for both parties and negotiating treaties and other transactions. He settled on the island just to the north and east of Fort Armstrong in 1833 after relocating from the fort itself. He continued to live there as the custodian for the Army depot that was left on the island following the closure of Fort Armstrong until his death in 1845.

During Davenport's life, he worked tirelessly to bring business to the local area and increase opportunities for the surrounding communities. This included his work with several prominent individuals, such as Henry Farnham, D.B. Sears, and John Deere. Business ventures such as the extension of the railroad to the area and the subsequent bridge across the Mississippi River were strongly supported by Davenport prior to his death. Sears and Deere came to the area at Davenport's behest to lobby for business in the newly established population center.

In the 1840s, David Sears had established a pair of dams that utilized Rock Island and its important waterway access. These mill dams connected the mainland of Illinois with Rock Island. Sears built the second dam from Rock Island to Benham's Island, now partially submerged north of Rock Island, in the main channel by 1846. Sears purchased the deed to Benham's Island in 1855, where he established a flour mill and a steamboat landing that also ferried people from the Illinois side of the river to the Iowa side through 1872. Just before gaining the deed to Benham's Island, Sears had persuaded John Deere and his business partners to resettle in Moline.<sup>1</sup>

After the Arsenal was established, it too generated its own individuals of notoriety. Born a free man in Muscatine, Iowa in 1845, Milton Howard and his family were kidnapped and forced into slavery when he was young. He joined the Union Army at the breakout of the Civil War. Howard then came back to work at Rock Island Arsenal after the war in 1866 where worked for 52 years. Howard is credited with the rescue of MAJ Flagler who had fallen through the ice on the river while inspecting one of the dams. Howard's family continued to work for the Army and Rock Island Arsenal for generations following his death, including service as the first Equal Employment Opportunity Officer and the first African-American foreman.<sup>2</sup>



Milton Howard

### TRIVIA

- 1 When did the last Confederate prisoners leave the Rock Island Prison Barracks?
- 2 What unfortunate order did the first commander at Rock Island Arsenal have to carry out just prior to taking command?
- 3 When did the last building built as a part of the Prison Barracks get torn down?

#### ANSWERS FOR MAY 2022 QUESTIONS

- 1 Some Confederate prisoners volunteered to leave the Rock Island Prison Barracks to fight for the Union. What was their title?  
➤ **Galvanized Yankees**
- 2 What was the post-war nickname given to the camp in a famous novel and later a movie?  
➤ **Andersonville of the North**
- 3 What was the name of the Iowa Soldiers Civil War mobilization camp located in Davenport, Iowa?  
➤ **Camp McClellan**

### WANNA BUY SOME ANGRY PLAY-DOH?

Did you know that ASC has two archives that is oversees? The main archive is in building 390 and primarily houses ASC related history, while the Rock Island Arsenal Archives in building 60 has more general history of the installations history. This archive has technical drawings, manuals, reports, photos, and many other objects, including this dude, the M2019 History Voodoo Doll. Created at some point in the past and hidden in the walls of building 60 for future historians to find and post about in their newsletter.



Other civilians such as William Baumbeck worked to have the significance of the Arsenal's capability recognized to ensure national readiness in times of war even during peacetime. After World War I, the War Department proposed closing or cutting the apprentice school at Rock Island. Baumbeck, seeing this as a significant loss of knowledge and readiness rallied his staff section. He encouraged his civilian leadership workforce to accept a pay cut in order to retain the program. The individuals who were in the apprenticeship program following Baumbeck's salvaging of the school were the skilled laborers who staffed the shops during World War II.<sup>3</sup>

Through the ages, Rock Island Arsenal has been a place of a distinguished and mission minded workforce that spans many generations from its inception to the present. For 160 years, the Arsenal has stood ready for the nation, but for over 200 years, Rock Island has drawn the interest of many leaders and visionaries.



Trivia answers, digital newsletters, and more history is available on the ASC History website:

<https://aschq.army.mil/About-Us/History>

- 1. History Office, Army Sustainment Command. *An Illustrated History of the Rock Island Arsenal and Arsenal Island*. Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois. 2010.
- 2. History Office, Army Sustainment Command. *Howard, Milton: One-Page History*. Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois. 2018.
- 3. Rock Island Arsenal Museum. *William Baumbeck Exhibit*. Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois. 2017.

History is being made every day at this command.

Presented to you by your friendly ASC History Office. Feel free to call or stop by our office for any of your history needs.



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ASC.PUB 870-1