



MILITARY HISTORY

The Rock Island Arsenal Museum

- 1776 Grand Union Flag Unveiled
- 1815 Battle of New Orleans
- 1871 Franco-Prussian War ends
- 1879 Zulu War begins
- 1918 Wilson's *Fourteen Points* are drafted
- 1942 Japanese seize Manila
- 1945 Auschwitz is liberated
- 1968 USS *Pueblo* seized by North Korea
- 1973 U.S. involvement ends in Vietnam
- 1993 START II Treaty is signed

DID YOU KNOW?

The clock tower on the West end of the island was finished sometime in 1867. The original design called for the building to be much smaller than it ended up being. GEN Rodman approved a design that included an extra 20 feet at the top which included a clock with four 12-foot faces. It was originally designed to be a freight elevator. The clock works that were installed in 1868 still functions today.

TRIVIA

- ① Who was the arsenal commandant that was influential in the establishing of the golf club house?
- ② What was the westernmost battle that occurred during the War of 1812?
- ③ What was the first naval battle that was fought entirely with air forces?

Last Month's Answers:

- ① What weapon was produced at the current site of the Rock Island Arsenal Museum?
The 1903 Springfield
- ② In what year did Locks and Dam 15 reach their completion?
1934
- ③ In World War II, where was the target of the first all-American bombing raid?
Tokyo

Answers to trivia and more are available on the ASC History Office's SharePoint page.

In April 1886, Lieutenant Colonel Daniel W. Flagler, commanding officer of Rock Island Arsenal supervised the completion of the ten stone workshops envisioned by General Thomas J. Rodman to serve as the heart of the island. Despite the grandeur of these workshops, which today line Rodman Avenue, the Army underwent a reduction after the Civil War and consequently, so did the Arsenal. Before 1898, the Arsenal employed less than 500 men and utilized only about 14 percent of the workshop floor space. Although this frustrated Flagler and successive commanders, the issue was remedied with the surge in manufacturing caused by the Spanish-American War.

The Arsenal's operations expanded so efficiently that new tasks were now assigned such as the manufacture and development of small arms along with personal equipment for infantry and cavalry Soldiers. Additionally the larger artillery equipment, artillery carriages, and all Army horse equipment was also assigned to Rock Island's development and manufacturing responsibilities. As the Chief of Ordnance, General Flagler additionally designated Rock Island Arsenal as a storage depot for captured weapons. These missions and efforts would help the Arsenal to house a quality military museum.

In the late 19th century, the American public grew interested in museums and educational opportunities like the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the St. Louis Exposition of 1904. Similarly, the United States Army was increasingly recognizing the importance of historical reflection and analysis in producing quality leadership. On 1 October 1903, United States Chief of Ordnance General William Crozier sent word to the Arsenal that fifteen boxes of ordnance materiel would shortly arrive "for the purpose of preserving it in a Military Museum to be established at the Rock Island Arsenal."

The boxes sent by Crozier included foreign weapons and accoutrements which had traveled from United States embassies throughout the world. The Arsenal added weapons studied or produced in the small arms development mission along with confiscated Native American weapons. For example, the Model 1903 serial number 1 rifle was immediately moved from the Arsenal workshop to the museum's collection after its fabrication on 20 December 1904. A majority of the dismantled army exhibits from the St. Louis and Chicago Expositions found a home at the Rock Island Arsenal Museum. This included models, pre-Revolution cannons, captured weapons from the Philippine Insurrection, and even life-sized teams of fully-equipped artillery horses. Local newspapers previewed the foreign exhibits before the museum officially opened on 4 July 1905, and continuously featured exhibits to attract visitors. The museum quickly gained a following throughout the surrounding community and area newspapers featured several of the exhibits.

With the beginning of the First World War, the Arsenal's armory shops prospered and expanded to support the increased appropriations and operations. Once the United States entered the war, Commanding Officer Colonel George Washington Burr ordered the museum boxed away and stored to allow for more shop space. At the end of the war, the Army cut back its historical initiatives and seemed unconcerned with reinstating the Rock Island Arsenal Museum. Acknowledging the Army's nonchalance, the community decided to get involved to ensure a return of the museum.

Taking advantage of the outpouring of post-war patriotism, the Rock Island, Davenport, and Moline Chambers of Commerce reached out to both Iowa and

Illinois Congressmen. Further, they reached out to the new Commanding Officer, Colonel Harry B. Jordan. The community desired to house the museum in the Clock Tower Building, the oldest stone building on the island. While the issue of the museum's location was debated in the newspapers, Colonel Jordan ordered the original site of the museum, the west wing of Shop A (building 102), to be cleared and prepared. Jordan also selected Arsenal civilian employee, Russell West, to perform the difficult task of assembling and taking care of the exhibits. The artifacts had not been stored in a way to ensure their preservation and a great number were taken to be displayed at the National Museum. Despite the losses, the museum made up for it with the addition of Allied, captured, and experimental weapons of the First World War. The museum reopened 4 July 1919.

Once his salary was cut in 1921, Russell West left the museum and his duties transferred to a series of enlisted men. Due to budget cuts and demobilization, the number of enlisted men on the island dropped so low that Commanding Officer Colonel David M. King ordered the Museum closed in the summer of 1923. The surrounding community joined together in their displeasure with these orders and sufficiently protested to force Colonel King to reverse his decision. Once again, the local community had saved the Rock Island Arsenal Museum.

From 1922 to 1934, the museum was poorly taken care of as public distrust of the military increased with the popularization of isolationist and anti-war sentiment. Finally, in 1934, Colonel Alexander G. Gillespie revamped the dying museum by hand-picking a new curator, Carl A. Stoelting. The new curator updated exhibits, instituted traveling displays, and constantly sought ways to interact with the public. Attendance grew to over 25,000 in 1939, but the start of the Second World War halted Stoelting's progress. Increased security measures on the island prevented public attendance, and shop space was needed.

There was no controversy in reinstating the museum at the end of the Second World War and the new commanding officer, Colonel Walter W. Warner, ordered the unpacking and arranging of the displays in Building 60. As previously, the storage had greatly damaged the collection. Also, many German guns of the First World War had been melted down in the foundry for manufacturing modern weapons. Another display issue arose because of the inability of tanks and large rocket launchers to fit through the doors of Building 60. However, this problem was solved in the early 1950s with the establishment of Memorial Park.

In 1958, the Ordnance Corps Memorial Board decided to rename the museum in remembrance of John M. Browning and his accomplishments. On 4 November 1959, the new John M. Browning Memorial Museum of Rock Island was formally dedicated. In the late 1970s, the Center of Military History criticized and questioned the point of having a museum unassociated with the Army. In response, the museum hired the first trained professionals in its history. The new team generated modernization plans, including an approach to gradually replace the John M. Browning Memorial Museum with the return of the Rock Island Arsenal Museum.

The Rock Island Arsenal Museum and its remarkable displays of military and local history has survived two world wars and several economic cutbacks largely due to the strong support of the surrounding communities as well as dedicated leaders and curators. The museum is open every Tuesday through Saturday from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.



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

Kevin Braafladt, Deputy Historian kevin.d.braafladt.civ@mail.mil ; Mark Struve, Assistant Historian mark.j.struve.civ@mail.mil
Building 390, Basement Southwest