

2021

## The Voice of Old Saratoga: A Revolutionary War Cannon in Natchez, Mississippi

Jeff T. Giambrone

*Mississippi Department of Archives and History*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/jmh>

---

### Recommended Citation

Giambrone, Jeff T. (2021) "The Voice of Old Saratoga: A Revolutionary War Cannon in Natchez, Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History*. Vol. 83: No. 3, Article 4.

Available at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/jmh/vol83/iss3/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Mississippi History* by an authorized editor of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact [aquilastaff@usm.edu](mailto:aquilastaff@usm.edu).

# The Voice of Old Saratoga: A Revolutionary War Cannon in Natchez, Mississippi

by Jeff T. Giambrone

In the winter of 1833, the mayor and selectmen of the city of Natchez received the following request:

Jefferson College, Feby. 6, 1833  
To the Prest. And Selectmen of the City of Natchez  
Gentlemen:  
Having been disappointed in receiving two pieces of artillery—I am induced to apply to your honourable body for the loan of Old Saratoga for a few days.  
Yours Very Respectfully,  
Partridge <sup>1</sup>

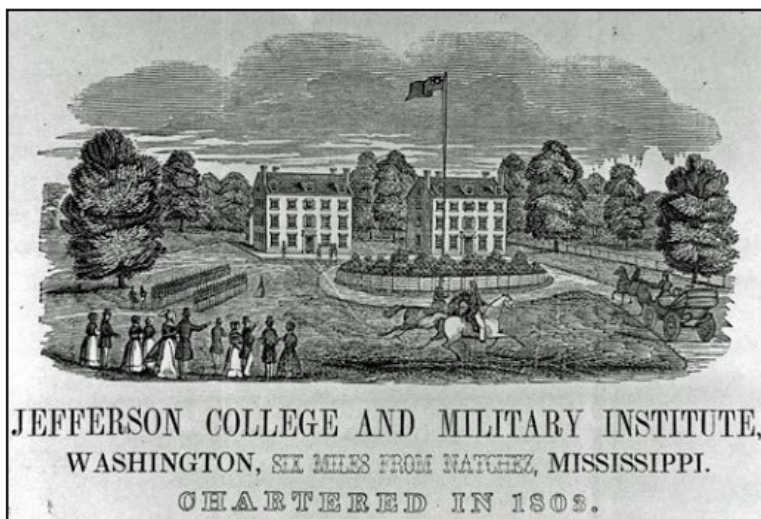
The message was written by Captain Alden Partridge, a former superintendent of the United States Military Academy at West Point, and at the time the letter was written, president of Jefferson College at Washington, Mississippi. The cannon that he asked to borrow, “Old Saratoga,” was a relic of the Revolutionary War, having been captured from the British in October 1777 at the Battle of Saratoga, New York. Requesting this particular cannon probably had special meaning for Alden, as his father Samuel Partridge had fought against the British in that historic battle.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Natchez Petitions, 1824-1833*, February 6, 1833. Microfilm Roll 36713, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

<sup>2</sup> W. A. Ellis & G. M. Dodge, *Norwich University, 1819-1911: Her History, Her Graduates, Her Roll of Honor* (Montpelier, VT: The Capital City Press, 1911), vol. 2, 21. For a history of “Old Saratoga,” see “That Cannon,” *The Natchez Weekly Courier*, August 30, 1839, 3.

JEFF T. GIAMBRONE earned a bachelor's degree in history from Mississippi State University and a master's from Mississippi College. He works as a reference librarian in the state archives. He is the author of four books, including *An Illustrated Guide to the Vicksburg Campaign and National Military Park* and many articles.



*19th Century Illustration of Jefferson Military College. Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.*

The connection between Natchez and “Old Saratoga” dated back to 1815 with the victory of General Andrew Jackson over the British at the Battle of New Orleans on January 8 of that year. On hearing of the American triumph, the president and board of selectmen of Natchez published the following resolution:

That the news of this morning of the defeat of the British troops, and their evacuation of their works, and precipitate retreat from the shores of the Mississippi, in the state of Louisiana, is highly important to the best interests, not only of this part of the United States, but to the American family in general. Therefore the President and Selectmen of this city, recommend to the citizens, as a demonstration of their feelings on this occasion, the illumination of their houses, this evening at seven o'clock, by exhibiting candles in their windows, in such numbers (always odd) as to them may seem proper.<sup>3</sup>

In April 1815, the city of Natchez received the exciting news that “Old Hickory” himself was going to stop at Natchez on his return to his home in Tennessee. The town planned a big celebration for Andrew Jackson’s arrival, and notified local resident James Foster that he was requested “on behalf of the citizens to manage and direct the firing of a federal salute in honor of the general on his arrival in town, and endeavor to

<sup>3</sup> *Minutes of the President & Selectmen of Natchez, 1811-1816, January 24, 1815. Microfilm roll 36667, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.*

obtain a piece of ordnance and ammunition sufficient at the expense of the city for the occasion.”<sup>4</sup>

Andrew Jackson and his family arrived in Natchez on April 22, 1815, and the *Natchez Gazette* wrote that the general “received the expressions of public veneration for his character and services by an entertainment from about 200 of the citizens of this town and vicinity.”<sup>5</sup> There was only one minor flaw in an otherwise perfect celebration—the city of Natchez was unable to acquire a cannon to give a salute for General Jackson. *The Natchez Weekly Courier* wrote about this slight and Jackson’s reaction to it.

On his reception some of the citizens apologized to him for his not being honored with a salute as they did not possess any artillery. Gen. Jackson replied that he would obviate any difficulty of that kind here-after and immediately wrote an order for two field pieces for the city of Natchez to the officers in New Orleans who had the U.S. Artillery in charge. This order he delivered to Col. James C. Wilkins who on presenting it, obtained the cannons and brought them to Natchez.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to “Old Saratoga,” the citizens of Natchez were gifted with a French cannon that had been cast in 1810 and captured by the English in Spain. The Americans in turn took possession of it after the Battle of New Orleans in 1815.<sup>7</sup> The two cannons arrived in Natchez by July 1815, as a local newspaper noted that on the Fourth of July “the dawn of day was ushered in by the discharge of cannon from the public square.”<sup>8</sup>

On the first anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans in 1816, the city of Natchez planned a grand commemoration of the event. The president and selectmen of the city appropriated fifty dollars “for the purpose of procuring powder and defraying other incidental[s] attending the firing of a federal salute or salutes on the 8<sup>th</sup> instant in honor of the glorious victory obtained on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 1815 by the American army commanded by Major General Jackson over the British army.”<sup>9</sup> Just a few days after the celebration, a Natchez newspaper writing

---

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, April 19, 1815.

<sup>5</sup> *Natchez Gazette*, April 26, 1815, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> “That Cannon,” *The Natchez Weekly Courier*, August 30, 1839, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> “That Cannon Again,” *The Natchez Weekly Courier*, September 4, 1839, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> “At Natchez,” *Natchez Gazette*, July 13, 1815, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Board of Selectmen Record of Accounts, 1815-1826*, January 1, 1816. Microfilm roll 36667, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

about the commemoration documented “Old Saratoga’s” link to her namesake battle.

The anniversary of the victory of the 8<sup>th</sup> January 1815, was celebrated by the “Natchez Volunteer Rifle Corps,” and numerous other citizens of Natchez in a style and spirit becoming so glorious an event. “The sweet morn divine,” was hailed by a federal salute from two brass pieces of artillery, accompanied with martial music. It was no diminution of the pleasure enjoyed on the occasion that the cannon employed had been captured from the enemy at Saratoga.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to documenting its capture at Saratoga, an 1839 article about the cannon noted the following:

It has seen hard service, as may be inferred from the inscriptions on it, by which we are informed that it was cast by the British in 1756; as part of the spoils in Burgoyne’s capture at Saratoga it fell into the hands of the Americans, and remained in active service in different parts of the United States until, with its fellow, (whose history is the same,) it was donated to the city of Natchez by Gen. Jackson.<sup>11</sup>

The Saratoga Campaign in September and October 1777 ended in a sweeping American victory that netted a large haul of captured British ordnance. Realizing the symbolic importance of these guns, a plan was formulated to mark them using relief carving to put the place and date of capture on the barrels. This work was done by Andrew Billings of Poughkeepsie, New York, who was contracted to mark the cannons surrendered at Saratoga. He carried out the relief work at West Point, New York, in 1783–1784. “Old Saratoga” was one of eighteen 6-pounder cannons surrendered by the British. Very few of the guns are still in existence, as their usefulness meant that they served their new American owners for many years until they were worn out and scrapped. Only three of the Saratoga 6-pounders are known to have survived.<sup>12</sup> “Old Saratoga” was known as a “6-pounder” because in the nomenclature of the time, cannons were classified according to the weight of the projectile they used. As a 6-pounder, the gun was designed to fire a round weighing just that amount.<sup>13</sup>

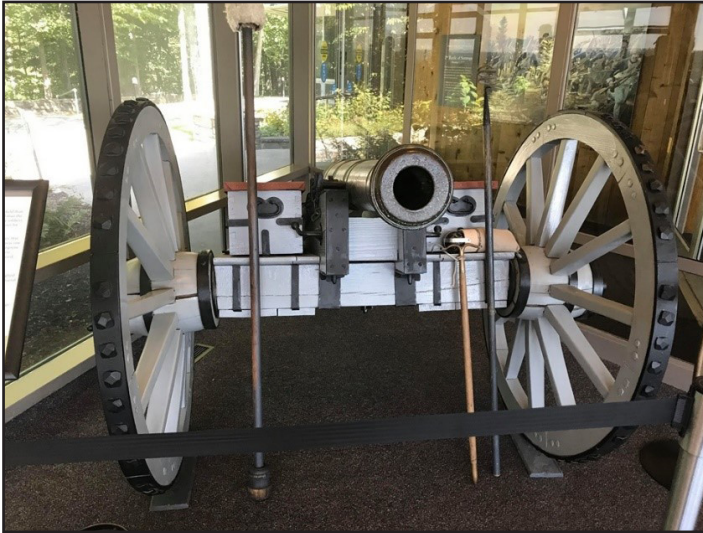
---

<sup>10</sup> “Celebration of the 8th Jan.,” *The Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), January 10, 1816, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> “That Cannon,” *The Natchez Weekly Courier*, August 30, 1839, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Douglas R. Cubbison, *The Artillery never gained more Honour*, (Fleischmanns, New York: Purple Mountain Press, 2007), 143-153.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.



*Original British 6-Pounder Cannon on display at Saratoga National Historical Park—“Old Saratoga” would have looked very similar to this gun. Photo courtesy of Tommy Lofton, Mississippi Armed Forces Museum, Camp Shelby.*

Although her history before arriving in Natchez is unclear at best, “Old Saratoga” is well documented after 1815. The surviving records clearly illustrate the prominent part that cannons played in the civic functions of the city for nearly half a century. While she was mostly used in a ceremonial role, on a few occasions “Old Saratoga” was called upon to defend her new home. In the early nineteenth century, Natchez had a well-deserved reputation for violence and mayhem. The city was visited by a wide variety of river traffic, and historian D. Clayton James noted that “ranking with gambling, prostitution, and drinking as the most popular vices of the town was street fighting, at which boatmen Mike Fink and James Girty became renowned.”<sup>14</sup> In May 1817, some of the rowdies at the landing became a little too high-spirited, and stern measures had to be taken to restore order. The *Mississippi Free Trader* wrote that

this city, or that part of it denominated Under the Hill, has, of late, been the theatre of much riot and disorder, produced by the crews of some of the boats and barges lying at the landing. The lives of two or three have been lost, and others dangerously wounded in these frays.

---

<sup>14</sup> D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 262.

Not satisfied with trampling under foot the laws, these rioters have, in the most insulting manner, set at defiance all those whose duty it is to maintain order and execute the laws. On Thursday last, a barge arrived from New Orleans, with a crew of twenty stout, hale young men: on Friday night they undertook to “regulate” the Under the Hill part of the town, in doing which they wounded several men, of whom one has since died. Every attempt of the officers to arrest them on Saturday proved fruitless—they were prepared for resistance, being well furnished with arms and ammunition—They declared their ability to chastise the whole city, and their determination to do so if they should be molested. It was not until Sunday, in the afternoon, that this hopeless band was finally brought to submission. One of the brass pieces of artillery was taken off and planted on the bluff in an eligible position to bear on the barge; many of the citizens volunteered their services; a detachment of the military from the barracks in aid of the civil authorities was marched down; and finding resistance vain, they surrendered, and were conducted under a strong guard to the City Hall, where they underwent an examination.<sup>15</sup>

Having two field pieces at their disposal in case of trouble certainly gave some piece of mind to the citizens of Natchez. One resident wrote to the editor of *The Mississippi Free Trader* and lauded the town for its efforts to protect its citizens. In his missive, he specifically mentioned when the cannons were used to defend Natchez.

Do you not recollect with what promptitude our two field pieces, presented to the city by the hero of New Orleans, have been drawn out on the least alarm of danger? More than a year ago, when in all probability the enemy intended to deluge us by turning the Mississippi through our streets, one of them was heroically planted upon the bluff, where it remained firmly and undeviatingly at its post for nearly six months.<sup>16</sup>

By 1819, a unit had been organized at Natchez to staff and fire the city’s cannons—the Natchez Volunteer Artillery Company, led by Captain James K. Cook, a local newspaper editor. The new unit played a prominent role in the Fourth of July festivities in 1819. An account of the celebration recorded:

the Natchez Volunteer corps of Artillery, commanded by Capt. James K. Cook, paraded and joined the citizens; their martial appearance, the enlivening sound of the music, and the thunder of their guns, gave an additional impulse to the proud feelings of the day.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> *The Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), May 28, 1817, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, December 20, 1817, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, July 6, 1819, p. 2.



These volunteer cannoneers wanted to look the part, so at a meeting on August 11, 1819, a resolution was adopted by the company that a uniform would be adopted. All the members were given until the first Saturday in September to obtain their uniform, and any members that did not comply and could not show good cause would “be considered as dismissed from the company.”<sup>18</sup> To show off their new look, Captain Cook ordered all the men to assemble for a parade at city hall on the first Saturday in September wearing their uniforms and carrying their equipment.<sup>19</sup>

As part of the Fourth of July celebration in 1820, the citizens of Natchez honored their artillery company with a flag presentation. On accepting the banner for the battery, Captain Cook made the following address to his men:

Soldiers—Remember this day—Look to that piece of artillery\*—Reflect on the incidents connected with it. In the Revolutionary War it was captured from the enemy in one of the northern sections of our country. Upwards of forty years after, in the most southern sections of it, and by the same enemy, it was re-taken; and in a few hours again recaptured by our gallant countrymen. The capitulation of Saratoga—the Battle of New Orleans—the name of Jackson, who presented this piece to the city of Natchez, and by its common council intrusted [sic] to our care, that banner of the symbol of Republic America, and the relic of conjugal affections, are these not a more grateful combination of circumstances, presented to us than usually falls to the lot of citizen-soldiers? Do they not excite your pride in the time of profound peace? And if it be our fate to carry them with us in a time of war, you could not be cowards in the battle. \*Surrendered by the Convention of Saratoga, October 17, 1777.<sup>20</sup>

If Captain Cook is to be believed, “Old Saratoga” was directly involved in the Battle of New Orleans, being captured by the British, and then recaptured by the Americans. This story may be true, but thus far no documentation of the cannon’s use in the fight has come to light.

In 1825, “Old Saratoga” was called on to take part in a welcome celebration for a hero of the Revolutionary War. The Marquis de Lafayette was on a tour of the United States, and on April 18, he made a brief stop in Natchez as he traveled up the Mississippi River. Lafayette reviewed the Natchez militia on Tichenor’s Field, but apparently by this time the Natchez Volunteer Artillery Company had disbanded, as the city’s cannons were operated and fired by riflemen

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., August 24, 1819, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., July 25, 1820, p. 3.





*Relief carving on one of the surviving British 6-Pounder cannon marking it as being captured at the Battle of Saratoga. Photo courtesy of Saratoga National Historical Park.*

under the command of Captain John Bobb. At a “beautiful promenade” overlooking the Mississippi River, Robert H. Adams delivered the main address to a joyful crowd. He praised Lafayette saying that

while fighting the battles of our Revolution by the side of Washington, the soil on which we stand was comparatively a desert—seldom traversed except by the untutored Indian—or the roaming beasts of the forest. Since then how great the change! The Liberty for which you fought, the Independence which you helped to achieve, have caused an expansion of spirit, a march of industry, and enterprise by which the obstacles of nature have been surmounted—and the boundless forests of the west converted into a fruitful garden.<sup>21</sup>

General Lafayette responded by thanking the people of Mississippi for their kindness to him, and said that he was “enabled to enjoy a sight, in which none of us old American patriots, can more fully delight than I do; the sight of those wonders produced among you by the blessings of self-government.”<sup>22</sup> After making his comments, Lafayette retired to the Steamboat Hotel, where a ball was held that night in his honor, and many toasts were made to the man hailed as “The Nation’s Guest.”<sup>23</sup>

Although “Old Saratoga” was regularly brought out for holidays and special occasions, the city did not have another dedicated artillery unit to operate her until 1839, when the Natchez Light Artillery was formed. In announcing the new unit, an advertisement noted, “This is a company we will be proud to see and which we anticipate soon to hear speak for themselves on the smoke-capped summit of the bluff. This company when organized, equipped and armed, will complete the Natchez arm of defense.”<sup>24</sup>

A few days later, the members of the Natchez Light Artillery elected

<sup>21</sup> *Natchez Gazette*, April 23, 1825, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *The Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), June 12, 1839, p. 2.

William M. Gwin captain, I.W. Satterlee 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant, and Charles A. Lacoste 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant.<sup>25</sup>

The new artillery company quickly made a name for themselves as they managed to instigate a war of words between Natchez and their neighboring town to the south, Woodville, in Wilkinson County. The affair started with an innocuous resolution made by the Natchez Light Artillery to the president and board of selectmen of the city.

I take the liberty of submitting to your consideration the subjoined resolution adopted at a meeting of the Natchez Light Artillery on the 6<sup>th</sup> inst., the object of which, you may peruse, is to bring about a concerted plan by which the valuable brass field piece, the fellow of our own famed "Saratoga," once loaned by this city to the authorities of Woodville, and now in the possession of the latter, can be assured. It would be of vast advantage to our corps in drilling until our battery is received from the General Government, and if there is no good reason why this trophy of by-gone days should not be reclaimed. It now affords me much pleasure to join with a committee of the city in making application for it and in taking prompt and decisive steps to insure its restoration to the city.<sup>26</sup>

The problem with the missing cannon had started back in July 1817, when the town of Woodville asked the city of Natchez to borrow one of their cannons for a Fourth of July celebration. The Natchez president and board of selectmen agreed to the loan of the unnamed cannon that had been gifted by Andrew Jackson along with "Old Saratoga." The celebration in Woodville was accomplished, but the town never returned the cannon, and Natchez never went to any trouble to reclaim it, at least until the Natchez Light Artillery asked for it in 1839.<sup>27</sup>

The Natchez city leaders duly sent their request for the cannon to Woodville, but after so many years, the people there considered the gun theirs, and they were not about to let go of it. The editor of the *Woodville Republican* published a very sarcastic reply to the Natchez demand for the cannon.

We are sorry that our Natchez friends put themselves to the trouble of sending for our old field piece, "by the authority of the corporation of Natchez." The authority of this corporation may be very potent, but we had scarcely thought an attempt would be made to stretch it over Wilkinson County. A word of advice to the citizens of Natchez: do not cheat yourselves into the belief that your 'authority' will be considered

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, June 15, 1839, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Communications to the President & Selectmen of Natchez*, July 10, 1839. Microfilm roll 36703, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

<sup>27</sup> "That Cannon." *The Natchez Weekly Courier*, August 30, 1839, p. 3.

as law. Kiss and hug your Vicksburg friends as much as you please, but have delicacy enough not to proclaim it abroad, as did the two lovers in Dryden, who prayed the Deity to annihilate both time and space, but make two lovers happy; or, if you are determined to make your amour public, we tell you—you may depend on your own means for effecting it, for you shall not have our cannon to do it.<sup>28</sup>

Although there was much bluster between the two cities, Natchez never pressed its claim to the cannon, and so it remained in Woodville.<sup>29</sup> The Natchez Light Artillery very much wanted another cannon, however, and they did manage to find one, although the circumstances of its acquisition remain somewhat murky. They had this second piece by 1839, as documented in a letter written by a local resident to his niece. He described a celebration held in honor of the militia of the city of Vicksburg, which had traveled to Natchez for a grand celebration. This person noted that among the Natchez militia units in attendance at the event were “the Natchez Legion, consisting of five volunteer companies, to wit—the Old Fencibles, the Natchez Guards, the Light Guards, the Hussars, and the Artillery, with two field pieces mounted and drawn by horses, well caparisoned in military trappings.”<sup>30</sup>

In time this new cannon was given a name as well; a local newspaper noted that “The ‘Old Saratoga’ and the ‘Mississippi’ in fine order are mounted on the Bluff and seem to look up the river in stern expectancy.”<sup>31</sup>

In 1840, “Old Saratoga” was brought out for a truly special occasion—the return of General Andrew Jackson to Natchez. The old soldier and statesman arrived in the city on January 15 to be greeted by an excited throng of citizens who “crowded the streets, and filled the roofs and windows of every edifice in the line of procession.”<sup>32</sup> The Natchez Light

<sup>28</sup> *The Woodville Republican*, August 17, 1839.

<sup>29</sup> The French cannon at Woodville stayed in the town until July 1863, when it was captured during a Federal expedition led by Major Asa Worden of the 14th Wisconsin Infantry. Worden’s superior, Brigadier General Thomas E. G. Ransom, wrote in his official report that the major had “captured and brought with him a beautiful 6-pounder gun, French manufacture, and said to have been used by General Jackson at New Orleans.” Robert N. Scott, editor, (1889) *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), series 1, vol. XXIV, part II, 685.

<sup>30</sup> “Letter to a Niece,” *The Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), August 28, 1839, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> “The Matches Lighted,” *The Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), July 31, 1839, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> “General Jackson’s Reception,” *The Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), January 16, 1840, p. 2.

Artillery and “Old Saratoga” played an important role in the welcoming ceremony for the former president, the cannoneers holding a vigil at their post overlooking the Mississippi River until:

about nine o'clock of the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup>, they fired a gun—it was the signal for the military to assemble on the commons, for the committee of arrangements, the orator and other officers of the day, to prepare for the reception of the General. A national salute announced his arrival at the landing. During the greater part of the day, the artillery were on duty. At the close of Col. Bingaman's address, they fired another salute. While the company were enjoying themselves at the festive board, they fired round after round to the toasts given in honor of the festival. At midnight, while the youth and beauty of Adams County were enjoying the music and the dance, they were again on the heights, and gave the parting salute to the veteran soldier and patriot, as he bid farewell—a last farewell—to the city of the bluffs.<sup>33</sup>

Andrew Jackson's visit to Natchez had been a rousing success, and “Old Saratoga's” part in the grand celebration further ingratiated the gun in the hearts and minds of the people of Natchez. In 1841, one admirer of the cannon penned a lengthy ode entitled “*OLD SARATOGA!*” The entire work is too long to quote, but a brief mention of the dialogue is in order. The author stated that his fellow citizens should:

tell her story to the youth around us, that the old affection which we of Natchez have cherished for the “old piece,” was not without cause, and that it may live in their breasts, when they too, like us, have dwelt with fondness upon her loud roar for long years, and looked upon her as an enduring memento of the gallantry of that handful, the little band of “Rifles” which on the plains of “Orleans,” stood the representatives of Natchez.<sup>34</sup>

Not to be outdone, two years later another anonymous writer penned a poem entitled “Old Saratoga,” that started with the rousing lines, “Thou hast a voice thou brave old gun, I've heard it cleave the air. Resound along the horizon, proclaim the nation's birth day come, rejoicing with the rising sun.”<sup>35</sup>

When parading through the city, the Natchez Light Artillery always made sure that both cannons looked their best. In such a procession in

---

<sup>33</sup> “Gen. Jackson's Visit,” *The Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), January 21, 1840, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> “OLD SARATOGA!” *Liberty Advocate* (Liberty, MS), November 18, 1841, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> “Old Saratoga,” *The Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), February 2, 1843, p. 2.

1844, they were described as being “in gorgeous style, drawn by four beautiful horses, (Gen. Quitman’s turn out,) ornamented with streamers, and all surmounted with a flag staff, having the banner of the United States, streaming ‘like a thunder cloud against the wind.’”<sup>36</sup>

“Old Saratoga” stood guard over her adopted city in both good times and bad. For the good, she had seen the population of Natchez grow steadily since her arrival. In 1820, the city only had 2,184 residents; by 1850, it more than doubled that number to 4,434 inhabitants. At the start of a new decade in 1860, Natchez had 6,612 citizens, making it the largest city in the state by a wide margin, beating out the second largest city Vicksburg, which only had a population of 4,591.<sup>37</sup>

The gun also witnessed her fair share of hardship; historian John Hebron Moore wrote of the troubles that befell Natchez.

The depression that plagued the entire Cotton Kingdom from 1837 to the late 1840s was a time of particular misfortune for Natchez. Disaster after disaster befell the residents of the town during these years. In 1839, abruptly falling cotton prices coupled with the aftereffects of the panic of 1837 bankrupted the Mississippi Railroad Company and the Mississippi Shipping Company. Collapse of the projected railroad between Natchez and Jackson wrote finis to the efforts of the mercantile community to tap the trade of central Mississippi.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to financial problems, the city of Natchez was also hit by natural disasters. In 1838 and 1839, terrible fires struck the business district, causing hundreds of thousands of dollars in losses.<sup>39</sup> To help combat future conflagrations, the city’s cannons were put to use as an early warning system. In October 1839, an article about the Natchez Fire Department noted that “in case of fire hereafter there will be THREE DISCHARGES OF CANNON, in quick succession, fired by the light artillery, to notify those of our citizens who may be in the environs that their aid is needed in Natchez.”<sup>40</sup>

The citizens of Natchez seemingly put these disasters behind them,

---

<sup>36</sup> “The Cannon Procession,” *The Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), August 17, 1844, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Economic Research Department, Mississippi Power & Light Company. *Mississippi Statistical Summary of Population, 1800-1980*, 1983.

<sup>38</sup> John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 192.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> “Natchez Fire Department,” *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* (Natchez, MS), October 7, 1839, p. 2.

and in April 1840, the Natchez Light Artillery was called out to help celebrate the anniversary of the Adams Light Guards, one of the city's militia companies. As the event was ending, bad weather rolled in, rain came down in sheets, and "every soldier of course was as wet as a drowned rat."<sup>41</sup> No one was hurt in the deluge, but it was a reminder that the weather could be quite mercurial. On May 7, 1840, Natchez found out just how deadly unexpected storms could be when a tornado ripped through the city with devastating results, killing more than 300 people.<sup>42</sup> One witness described the storm as a "dreadful visitation of Providence," and that the survivors were "all in confusion, and surrounded by the destitute, the houseless, the wounded, and the dying. Our beautiful city is shattered as if it had been stormed by all the cannon of Austerlitz."<sup>43</sup>

Just six years later, Natchez faced the whirlwind again, only this time it was caused by the winds of war. A longstanding dispute over the border between Mexico and Texas boiled over into conflict, and fighting broke out in the region in April 1846. Tensions were running high, and war was expected at any moment. On May 7, 1846, Company A of the 4<sup>th</sup> Mississippi Militia Regiment posted the following advertisement in a Natchez newspaper:

Every member of the Company is requested to hold himself in readiness a moments warning to march to the frontiers of Mexico, and should it be necessary, even to the halls of Montezuma. Mississippi to the rescue, the militia, our country's bulwark of defense and strong arm of protection, cannot be surrounded. Company A will meet at the court house when the signal of three rounds is given from old Saratoga.<sup>44</sup>

President James K. Polk asked for a declaration of war with Mexico, and the United States Congress did so on May 13, 1846. Polk called on the states to supplement the tiny regular army by providing 20,000 volunteers to fight in Mexico. Congress also granted the president authority to commission colonels and six brigadier generals from civilian life to lead these volunteer soldiers into battle.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> "The Adams Light Guards," *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), April 23, 1840, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> K. Sherman-Morris, C. Wax, & M. Brown, *Mississippi Weather and Climate* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 89.

<sup>43</sup> "Dreadful Visitation of Providence," *The Weekly Mississippian* (Jackson, MS), May 15, 1840, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> "Attention Company A," *The Mississippi Free Trader* (Jackson, MS), May 7, 1846, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Sam Olden, "Mississippi and the U.S.-Mexican War, 1846-1848," *Mississippi*

Mississippians were excited by the chance to fight for their country, but the state was only asked to furnish a single thousand man regiment for the war. Soon militia companies from all over the state were flocking to the rendezvous point at Vicksburg hoping to be picked for the regiment.<sup>46</sup> Among them was the Natchez Fencibles, commanded by Captain Thomas W. Clay. In an effort to recruit new soldiers to the company, an advertisement was placed in the newspaper asking that “all who are desirous of responding to the call made upon the valor and patriotism of our citizens, are earnestly desired to enroll their names at once.”<sup>47</sup> When the Fencibles left for Vicksburg, they had a good luck charm along for the trip.

As the *Paul Jones* ploughed her way up the Father of waters, shots were exchanged between “Old Saratoga,” which favorite old gun the Fencibles took with them, and the gun of the Natchez Guards. For be it understood the Fencibles took along “Old Sal,” as she is familiarly called, to stir up the citizens in, and on the way to, Vicksburg.<sup>48</sup>

Much to the chagrin of the eager volunteers in the Natchez Fencibles, their company was not chosen as one of the ten that would make up the 1<sup>st</sup> Mississippi Regiment. The citizens of Natchez were outraged that their local sons had been passed over, so they did what any angry people would do—they held a public meeting and passed a resolution, a part of which stated:

resolved, that this meeting has received with deep mortification and indignation the report made to it by the officers and members of the Natchez Fencibles, and by disinterested parties, of the treatment which that gallant corps has met with at the hands of the Governor of this State and of his Receiving Officers at Vicksburg.<sup>49</sup>

To assuage their hurt pride, a new infantry company was formed named the “Sparrow Volunteers,” commanded by Captain James D. Galbraith. This unit promptly crossed the Mississippi River and joined the 4<sup>th</sup> Louisiana Infantry regiment as Company E. It took some effort,

---

*History Now* website, accessed August 26, 2020: <https://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/mississippi-and-the-us-mexican-war-1846-1848>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> “Notice to Volunteers,” *Mississippi Free Trader and Natchez Gazette* (Natchez, MS), May 9, 1846, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> “The Natchez Fencibles,” *The Natchez Weekly Courier*, June 10, 1846, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> “Public Meeting,” *The Natchez Weekly Courier*, June 24, 1846, p. 1.



but Natchez was going to war.<sup>50</sup>

As the conflict went on, the citizens of Natchez followed the news of the fighting closely, and “Old Saratoga” was used on numerous occasions to announce the glad tidings of victory. The city’s cannons were used in March 1847 to mark General Zachary Taylor’s victory at the Battle of Buena Vista, and the next month they fired 100 rounds to celebrate the “glorious news of the taking of Vera Cruz and castle of San Juan De Ulloa.”<sup>51</sup>

The fighting ended in September 1847 with the capture of Mexico City by United States forces. Leading the march into the capital was the favorite son of Natchez, General John A. Quitman.<sup>52</sup> His fellow citizens gathered and decided to reward the general with a presentation sword, and while they were meeting, “fifty guns were fired from old Saratoga on the bluff and a splendid bonfire illuminated the scene.”<sup>53</sup>

With the war over, the citizen-soldiers began to make their way home, and “Old Saratoga” was waiting to give them a loud and hearty welcome. No soldier got a grander reception than “Old Rough and Ready” himself, Zachary Taylor. The general arrived at Natchez by steamboat on December 22, and was greeted by “the boom of old Saratoga.”<sup>54</sup> He was met at the landing by a reception committee, who hustled Taylor into a carriage for the trip to Institute Hall, “where the ceremony of crowning the hero by the young lady pupils of the institution took place.<sup>55</sup> Afterwards he was escorted to the City Hotel where a throng “of several thousands, pressed upon him eager to take by the hand the gallant man who had performed such prodigies in valor and led our arms to victory and renown against such fearful odds.<sup>56</sup>

The victory in the war with Mexico brought with it a host of troubles as a new decade dawned. During the 1850s the split between North

---

<sup>50</sup> “The Sparrow Guards,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), May 27, 1846, 2; H. G. Howell, *Mississippi rifles: A muster listing of all known Mississippi soldiers, sailors, and marines who served in the Mexican War, 1846-1848*, (Greenville, SC: Southern Historical Press, 2005), 10.

<sup>51</sup> *The Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), March 25, 1847, 2; April 7, 1847, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas W Cutrer, “Quitman, John Anthony.” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed August 3, 2020: <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fqu07>.

<sup>53</sup> *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), September 20, 1847, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> “Gen. Taylor in Natchez,” *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), December 29, 1847, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

and South over the issue of slavery grew deeper as crisis after crisis threatened to tear the country apart. The debate over slavery in the territory gained in the war with Mexico, the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, fighting in "Bloody Kansas," and John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry were just a few of the problems pushing the nation to the brink of civil war.<sup>57</sup>

As mentioned above, one of the stepping-stones on the road to war was something as simple as the publication of a book. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe was a powerful indictment of the institution of slavery. The work was first published in serial form in a newspaper in 1851, and the next year it came out as a book and became a huge hit, selling over 300,000 copies in the United States in its first year.<sup>58</sup> The novel was widely reviled in the South, and this was particularly so in Natchez, which was home to Forks of the Road, the second largest domestic slave market in the Deep South. One newspaper in the city published a scathing review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that took up almost an entire page. Written by someone identified only as "B. W. H.," the reviewer made the following incendiary comment:

Evidently disunion is Mrs. Stowe's highest and most sanguine expectation; with the hope of helping on this end, she has written this book. She has struck the most popular vein. Her distempered appeals are made under the cover of romance. She would launch out upon the cheerless ocean of revolution, with the same high, reckless spirit that she has recommended higher law.<sup>59</sup>

The ties binding the nation together were beginning to come apart; this growing rift was commented on in Natchez as well as cities and towns all over the South. In 1853, an article in a local newspaper had this to say about the upcoming Independence Day celebration.

FOURTH OF JULY. This day, ever memorable in American history, will not be wholly forgotten in and about Natchez this year. This is as it should be. If we do not feel like having a general celebration by oration, dinner, &c, we can manifest our regard for the anniversary in social gatherings, national salutes, military parades, pic-nics, fish-fries, &c. To many this appears more democratic, more republican; but to us, the

---

<sup>57</sup> Richard Nelson Current and John Ray Skates. "Mississippi." In *Encyclopedia of the Confederacy* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 3:1046-52.

<sup>58</sup> Webit. (n.d.). *Uncle Tom's Cabin: A Moral Battle Cry for Freedom*. Retrieved August 31, 2020, from <https://www.harrietbeecherstowecenter.org/harriet-beecher-stowe/uncle-toms-cabin/>.

<sup>59</sup> "Uncle Tom's Cabin." *Natchez Daily Courier*, November 26, 1852, p. 3.

good old-fashioned, cannon-speaking, oration-delivering, and barbecue Fourth, was what we always patriotically responded to—it seemed more like the beating pulse of a whole nation in one common cause.<sup>60</sup>

The article went on to say that there would be a national salute, “making old ‘Saratoga’ again bid defiance to tyrants from its deep-mouthed throat.”<sup>61</sup> The “tyrants” spoken of, however, were no longer foreign; this remark was aimed at the people of the North, whom the citizens of Natchez were regarding as enemies rather than fellow countrymen.

As the sectional tensions increased, the city of Natchez began to pay more attention to its militia companies. In May 1858, a local newspaper ran a story about the past glory of the militia.

Sixteen years ago we visited Natchez in company with the Old Claiborne Guards, that corps being the guest of the Natchez companies, and we rarely ever witnessed a more beautiful display of the true, genuine, old-fashioned “soldiering.” Adams County had four volunteer companies at the time, the Fencibles, Capt. Jahen; the Natchez Guards, Capt. Page; the Adams Light Guards, Capt. Clark, and a Cavalry company, under command of Capt. B.O. Smith. As these four companies escorted the Claiborne Guards, under Col. Parkinson, up the bluff from the landing, the whole command of old Chapultepec “hissself,” on a bright, balmy October morning, amid the bellowings of old Saratoga, and the shouts of a thousand voices, we thought it the handsomest day and the handsomest scene that ever gladdened our heart.<sup>62</sup>

The writer of these lines also urged the people of Natchez to support a build-up of the militia: “We concur most fully in the suggestions of Col. Hillyer, in favor of a renewal and revival of the volunteer spirit; it is a part of our republican plan, and it is certainly more important that it should be encouraged and kept up in the slave states than elsewhere.”<sup>63</sup>

The militia companies in the city began to take their duties more seriously with the threat of sectional conflict looming. In August 1860, the Natchez Fencibles successfully petitioned the Natchez Board of Selectmen to use city hall as an armory and to erect gun racks within the structure. Three months later, the Fencibles offered their services to the city “for special police duty by day or night, so long as the same may be required.” This offer was received with the thanks of the Board,

---

<sup>60</sup> “Fourth of July.” *Natchez Daily Courier*, June 24, 1853, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> “Volunteer Companies,” *The Natchez Weekly Democrat*, May 5, 1858, p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

and the mayor was authorized to call on the company whenever he felt it was needed.<sup>64</sup> While the Natchez infantry companies were busy improving their ability to defend the city, it was decided to upgrade the artillery as well. The Saratoga's sister cannon was known by this time as the "General Quitman," and in December 1860, the Board of Selectmen resolved to find out how much it would cost to put the carriage into a state of "complete repair."<sup>65</sup>

These efforts to modernize and equip the militia took on a new importance after news of abolitionist John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia, reached Natchez in October 1859. The fear of an insurrection of enslaved people was always on the minds of White Southerners, and the attack at Harper's Ferry seemed to be the proof that the Republican Party was responsible for the act. One Mississippi journalist wrote of the Republicans.

In this murderous foray of that infamous confederacy of fanatics and brigands we have but an inadequate foretaste of the spirit which they would infuse into an Administration elevated to power upon the principles which they unblushingly avow as their political creed. With what show of reason, they, can it be assumed that the South whose rights are assailed, ought to fold her arms in fancied security, and permit such an Administration to be inaugurated over her?

The author concluded his article with this incendiary call to action. "The Irresistible Conflict has commenced. Let the Southern people take warning!"<sup>66</sup>

The election of Abraham Lincoln as president in November 1860 galvanized the South to act, and on January 7, 1861, the state of Mississippi opened a secession convention at the State Capitol in Jackson. Many in Natchez were not in favor of immediate secession; the rich planters had much to lose in a war, and they did not support such hasty action. People all over Mississippi were divided on the issue of secession, but as historian John K. Bettersworth explained, the differences between the two groups were rather subtle.

Amid the welter of argumentation that ensued, Mississippians took their stand on the secession issue less upon such vague abstractions as

---

<sup>64</sup> *Natchez Board of Selectmen Minutes*, August 7, 1860; November 7, 1860. Microfilm Roll 36671, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, January 2, 1861.

<sup>66</sup> "The Harper's Ferry Insurrection and its Lesson," *Semi-Weekly Mississippian*. (Jackson, MS), October 25, 1859, p. 2.

states rights than upon the solid practical ground of self-preservation. Fundamentally, both secessionists and Unionists were concerned with the perpetuation of a certain social system. Their difference lay only in the manner of accomplishment. For wealthy planters in Natchez and nonslaveholders in the Piney Woods, the status quo, evil as it was, was sufficient unto the day.<sup>67</sup>

On January 9, 1861, the delegates to the convention voted on the ordinance of secession that stated unequivocally, "Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery—the greatest material interest of the world." The vote was 84 to 15 in favor; among those voting no were the Adams County delegates, Alexander K. Farrar and Josiah Winchester.<sup>68</sup>

Mississippi became the second state to leave the Union, following the lead of South Carolina. On March 29, 1861, the secession convention ratified the Confederate constitution and the state officially became part of the Confederate States of America.<sup>69</sup> Although many in Natchez had not wanted secession, once it was an established fact, most gave their support to the new national government. When the city celebrated the birthday of George Washington, it was noted that there was another event being recognized as well.

The glorious demonstrations in this city on Thursday night and Friday last, were not solely in honor of Washington's Birth Day. This year another EVENT engaged public attention, and it was the natal day of the great Washington that was so appropriately selected as eminently adapted to the purposes of the demonstration. That event was the recognition and endorsement by the people of Natchez and Adams County, regardless of old party lines, of the action of Mississippi's convention of representatives of the people, in passing the Ordinance of Secession, the action of the Montgomery Convention, and the election of those distinguished Southerners, Davis and Stephens to the chief offices of the Southern Confederacy.<sup>70</sup>

With war now seemingly inevitable, cities all over the South began to hastily arm themselves for the coming conflict. The city of Natchez

---

<sup>67</sup> John K. Betterworth, *Confederate Mississippi* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1943), 4-5.

<sup>68</sup> T. B. Smith, *The Mississippi Secession Convention: Delegates and Deliberations in Politics and War, 1861-1865*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 74-79.

<sup>69</sup> Glover Moore, "Separation from the Union 1854-1861" In *A History of Mississippi*, vol. 1, Richard A. McLemore, ed. (Jackson, MS: University and College Press of Mississippi, 1973), 443-446.

<sup>70</sup> "The People Acted." *Mississippi Free Trader* (Natchez, MS), March 4, 1861, p. 4.

was used as an example and lauded for its strong militia system. In an article published by a Kentucky newspaper, the militia companies of Natchez were described in great detail. The article closed with this statement. "Natchez has also two Cannon Squads, with fine brass pieces of the U.S. service pattern; and two more cannon, including the historic 'Old Saratoga' in reserve."<sup>71</sup> With no enemy forces near Natchez, the citizens also felt confident that their defenses could hold off any attacker. One newspaper wrote, "At Natchez, the river is rising. The sandbar is again almost covered with water. We shall soon present a good river to Uncle Sam's largest crafts, and a plenty of cannon on our levees to give them a warm reception."<sup>72</sup>

In April 1861, the threat to Natchez became much more serious when an urgent telegram was received by Mayor John Hunter. He quickly called for a meeting of the Board of Selectmen, and gave them the startling news.

The mayor read a telegraphic dispatch which he had just received from the Committee of Safety of the city of Memphis, Tennessee, stating that Federal troops were concentrating at Cairo, Illinois, & that their probable object was to make a decent upon the towns on the river & therefore on motion of Mr. Dicks, it was, Resolved that one thousand dollars be appropriated from the funds of the city, to be placed under the control and disbursement of a select committee, for the purpose of purchasing powder, repairing ordnance and placing the city in such defense, as circumstances may require.<sup>73</sup>

The money appropriated by the Board of Selectmen was used to purchase fifty kegs of black powder, and the two modern pieces of artillery that the city had were bored, sighted, and had new accoutrements procured. One cannon also had its carriage repaired. In addition, the local foundry cast 225 round shot and 200 canister shot. Some of the money was spent on Old Saratoga as well. Upon examination the gun was found to be "defective and dangerous: she has been rebored and if after testing found safe will be mounted cheaply to be used as a salute gun and if necessary will speak for herself in service."<sup>74</sup> About this same time, the board of selectmen authorized the erection of a powder magazine

---

<sup>71</sup> "Mississippi Military Affairs." *The Louisville Daily Courier* (Louisville, KY) January 22, 1861, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Natchez Daily Courier*, January 26, 1861, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> *Natchez Board of Selectmen Minutes*, April 23, 1861, Microfilm Roll 36671, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, June 4, 1861.

to safely store the city's black powder. It also gave control of the city's cannons to the Natchez Artillery Company and made it "subject to the order of the mayor."<sup>75</sup> Nothing came of the warning from Memphis, but if a new threat emerged, Natchez planned to be ready.

In December 1860, the city of Natchez was ordered by the Chief Ordnance Officer of Mississippi to turn over its two modern cannons, the "Governor" and "Gen. Quitman" to the state. The city fathers delayed carrying out this order as long as they could, but grudgingly turned over the guns in July 1861.<sup>76</sup> The people of Natchez were not happy about giving up their only means of defense, and they were quick to inform their elected officials of their dissatisfaction. General William Wallace Wood, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division of the Mississippi Militia and responsible for Natchez, sent the following letter to Governor John J. Pettus in which he explained in great detail the condition of the city's defenses and why they needed their cannons back:

Some days ago I received from the Adj. Genl. Orders under date Dec. 11, 1860, embodying instructions from you requesting me to have forwarded to his or your address at Jackson, two certain pieces of cannon. The chief of my staff has acknowledged to the chief of yours the receipt of the letter containing those orders & has advised him that I would communicate with you direct on this subject.

Very many years ago—nearly a half a century has elapsed since then—a brass six pound field piece, christened the "Saratoga" fell into the possession of our citizens. It is a trophy of war and for many years, and until within the last decade, has been our "Salute Gun" for National Anniversaries, Festivals, Gala Days, etc. That piece is honey-combed, unfit for use, and laid aside as a prized relict of other days. Subsequently, but long ago, an iron gun, of same calibre, came into the possession of our people. It has long ago, also, become unfitted for service.

It was during the administration of Gov. A.G. Brown (in 1842, I think,) that he, Brown, presented to a volunteer corps of this city, called the "Natchez Guards," which corps has a peculiar charter & is subject only to the Governor's orders (see laws 1838 page) a six pounder brass field piece, which was christened the "Governor;" and shortly after he presented to another corps in this city, the "Natchez Fencibles," a similar gun, which is called the "Quitman," in honor of the first captain of that corps. Capt. J.A.T. Midderhoff, one of our most prominent lawyers, is commander of the "Guards," and Capt. Ed M. Blackburn, a physician of fine repute & practice, is commander of the "Fencibles." Bonds were given for these guns as are given for all other arms received from the state.

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., May 21, 1861.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., July 16, 1861.



The "Governor" is mounted fully though the Adj. General missed its "limber" which was & is in its carriage house. The "Quitman" is being mounted by the city. These guns receive such care as is ordinarily bestowed. They are needed here. This is an assailable point. They are the only cannon in this the metropolis & most exposed part of the state. They have been in our keeping for many years, and have become, as it were, part & parcel of our home & its associations. There is a marked feeling of astonishment & pain among all classes of our people on learning that Natchez might be deprived of these essential means of protection.

There are now organized & organizing in the city of Natchez & county of Adams a force whose perfect efficiency requires artillery. 1st—a dragoon corps, 2d a rifle corps, 3d three infantry corps and 4th a corps of home reserve, using the double barrel shot gun, charged with buck shot. These companies are—Adams Troop, Capt. Wm. T. Martin, Natchez Fencibles, Capt. Ed M. Blackburn, Natchez Guards, Capt. J.A.T. Midderhoff, Adams Light Guard Battalion (2 companies) Lt. Col. R. Clarke, and Natchez Home Guard, Capt. W.W. Walkins Sr., total 400 men.

I have communicated the contents of Genl. Sykes' letter to Capts. Midderhoff (Guards) & Blackburn (Fencibles). I hope your Excellency will view this subject as we do.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the appeal to the governor the ordnance was not returned, and Natchez had to cobble together a defense with what they had on hand. In November 1861, William P. Mellen, captain of the local artillery company, petitioned the board "praying that the gun 'Saratoga' be bushed so as to make her serviceable." This involved repairing the vent hole at the breech of the gun so that it could be fired using a friction primer.<sup>78</sup>

The shortage of cannons grew so acute that General P. G. T. Beauregard sent out the following appeal in March 1862:

To the Planters of the Mississippi Valley:

More than once a people, fighting with an enemy far less ruthless than yours; for imperiled rights not more clear and sacred than yours; for homes and a land not more worthy of resolute and unconquerable men than yours; and for interests of far less magnitude than you have now at stake, have not hesitated to melt and mould [sic] into cannon the precious bells surmounting their houses of God, which has called generations to prayer. The priesthood have ever sanctioned and

---

<sup>77</sup> Correspondence of Governor John J. Pettus; Letter from General William W. Wood dated January 8, 1861. Series 757, Microfilm Roll 1812, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, November 19, 1861.

consecrated the conversion, in the hour of their nation's need, as one holy and acceptable in the sight of God. We want cannon as greatly as any people whoever, as history tells you—melted their church bells to supply them. And I, your General, entrusted with the command of the army embodied of your sons, your kinsmen, and your neighbors, do now call on you to send your plantation bells to the nearest railroad depot, subject to my order, to be melted into cannon for the defense of your plantations. Who will not cheerfully and promptly send me his bells under such circumstances? Be of good cheer, but time is precious.<sup>79</sup>

The need for cannons was so great that even an antique such as “Old Saratoga,” which had been cast over a century earlier, was needed for the defense of the state of Mississippi. On March 18, 1862, the Natchez Board of Selectmen voted to loan their beloved gun to the “Confederate authorities.”<sup>80</sup>

The citizens of Natchez responded to Beauregard's appeal by forming a committee to aid in sending plantation bells to the army. They also placed an advertisement in the newspaper calling on the planters of Adams County to “RING YOUR BELLS FOR THE LAST TIME, while this unjust and iniquitous war continues. Respond at once to the CALL OF GEN. BEAUREGARD and freely offer them to be moulded [sic] into cannon for the defense of all you hold dear.”<sup>81</sup>

Some of the bells donated in Natchez were melted down and cast into cannons to be used by a local artillery company. While encouraging young men to join this battery, the *Natchez Daily Courier* noted that

volunteers, who enroll themselves in the new Artillery Company now forming in Natchez, will recollect that they are to have field pieces cast here at our own foundry, and of the very first quality metal. The old “Saratoga,” a sort of household fixture among us, and the numerous plantation bells thrown in to the furnace to make up a sufficiency for a battery of artillery, cannot fail of making music for the Federals when opportunity offers. Let the Company, if possible, be filled to completion before the meeting on Friday; and then let our citizens at once present them with a Natchez-made battery of six-pounders.<sup>82</sup>

By early April 1862, it was apparent that the Federal navy under Flag Officer David G. Farragut was preparing to run the Confederate

---

<sup>79</sup> “Gen. Beauregard's Last Appeal,” *Weekly State Journal* (Raleigh, NC), March 26, 1862, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Natchez Board of Selectmen Minutes*, March 18, 1862. Microfilm Roll 36671, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.

<sup>81</sup> “Planters of Adams County!,” *Natchez Daily Courier*, April 10, 1862, p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Natchez Daily Courier*, April 10, 1861, p. 1.

forts on the Mississippi River and attempt to capture New Orleans. The people of Natchez knew that if the Crescent City fell, it would only be a short time before a powerful Federal fleet was at their doorstep.<sup>83</sup> The long dreaded day came on May 12, 1862, when a U.S. naval vessel sailed upriver to Natchez and sent the following ultimatum to the mayor:

In advance of the squadron now coming up the Mississippi, I am instructed by the Flag Officer to demand the surrender of the city of Natchez to the naval forces of the United States. The same terms will be accorded as those granted to New Orleans and Baton Rouge. The rights and property of all peaceable citizens shall be respected; but all property in this city belonging to the so-called Confederate States must be delivered up, and the flag of the United States must wave unmolested and respected over your town.<sup>84</sup>

With no troops and a minimal ability to defend the town, Natchez Mayor John Hunter sent the following reply to the U.S. naval forces:

Sir, Your communication of the 12<sup>th</sup> inst., has been received by me and laid before the Board of Selectmen of this city and I am directed to return the following reply: Coming as a Conqueror, you need not the interposition of the city authorities to possess this place. An unfortified city, an entirely defenseless people, have no alternative but to yield to an irresistible force, or uselessly, to imperil innocent blood. Formalities are absurd in the face of such realities. So far as the city authorities can prevent, there will be no opposition to your possession of the city; they cannot, however, guarantee that your flag shall wave unmolested in the sight of an excited people: but such authority as they possess, will be exercised, for the preservation of good order in the city. As to property belonging to the Confederate States, they are not aware of any such, within the limits of the city.<sup>85</sup>

When Mayor Hunter sent this message to the Federal fleet, he had to be aware that "Old Saratoga" had been loaned to the Confederate authorities, and it was certainly something that the enemy would expect to be handed over. Unfortunately, the written record is entirely silent on the ultimate fate of the gun. Was she handed over to the U.S. Navy, or hidden away to be reclaimed at some future date when the tide of war had changed? Perhaps she was spirited out of town and melted down

---

<sup>83</sup> Edwin C. Bearss, "The Armed Conflict 1861-1865," in *A History of Mississippi*, vol. 1. Richard A. McLemore, ed. (Jackson, MS: University and College Press of Mississippi, 1973), 443-446.

<sup>84</sup> *Natchez Board of Selectmen Minutes*, April 12, 1862. Microfilm Roll 36671, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, May 13, 1862.

to build more a more modern field piece for the war effort. For now, her ultimate fate remains unknown.

Although “Old Saratoga” had disappeared during the chaos of war, it was not the last cannon to call Natchez home. In 1876, a new militia unit was formed in the city known as the Tilden Light Artillery. This unit purchased a surplus brass 6-pounder cannon from New York for its use. The purpose for which this gun was acquired, however, was decidedly sinister. Mississippi was still being “reconstructed” by the federal government, a process which White Democrats in the state planned to bring to an end as quickly as possible. To aid in this process, White militias were being organized throughout the state, including companies of infantry, cavalry, and artillery at Natchez. Testifying before a congressional committee, Republican newspaper editor A. M. Hardy related that these military organizations “were organized as a menace to the colored people of the county.”<sup>86</sup> With the end of Reconstruction in 1877, the cannon was put to more peaceful uses, such as in 1920, when it was used during the filming of the Civil War silent film, *Heart of Maryland*.<sup>87</sup>

Soon after the end of the Spanish-American War, the city of Natchez acquired another cannon when the board of aldermen passed a resolution asking “that our Congressman and Senators be requested to call on the Secretary of War and Navy and request of them the loan or gift of one of the cannons captured from the Spaniards. The same to be placed in the Memorial Park as a remembrance of the valor and courage of our soldiers and sailors in said war.”<sup>88</sup>

The request was honored, and in early May 1900, a nineteenth century Spanish muzzle-loading cannon that had been captured in Cuba was delivered to Natchez. Some were less than impressed with the city’s new war trophy. One newspaper described the gun as “a large rust-eaten iron cannon, taken from the Spanish fortifications at Santiago de Cuba.” The article did charitably admit that “it will be valued not for its intrinsic worth, but as a perpetual testimony of the valor of American soldiers.”<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> *Mississippi: Testimony as to denial of elective franchise in Mississippi at the elections of 1875 and 1876: Taken under the resolution of the Senate of December 5, 1876* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1877), 136.

<sup>87</sup> “Heart of Maryland Company Will Leave Here on Thursday,” *The Natchez Democrat*, December 1, 1920, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> “Board of Aldermen,” *The Natchez Democrat*, April 7, 1900, p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> “Spanish Cannon in Memorial Park,” *The Natchez Democrat*, May 25, 1900, p. 4.

The cannon was placed on a pedestal in Memorial Park at Natchez, with a plaque proclaiming it to be a trophy taken during the Spanish-American War. It remains in the park to this day in commemoration of the local soldiers who fought in that long-ago conflict.<sup>90</sup>

Hopefully one day the mystery surrounding the fate of “Old Saratoga” will be solved, and it can join her Spanish cousin at Memorial Park. The ancient relic may be hidden in some long forgotten spot in Natchez, just waiting to be resurrected and returned to her former glory. And then the newspapers can proudly proclaim, as they did once long ago, that “the voice of old Saratoga peals forth this morning from the city of the bluffs.”<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Mimi Miller, “Cannon Fodder,” *Natchez the Magazine*, September/October 2020, pp. 40-43.

<sup>91</sup> *The Natchez Weekly Courier* (Natchez, MS) July 6, 1838, p. 2.