

MILITARY ORDER OF THE LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES



Loyal Legion Vignettes



REVOLUTIONARY WAR CANNONS OF THE HMS ACTAEON DISPLAYED AT THE LAFAYETTE PARK IN ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

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This Vignette was prepared in response to the excellent article by Commander Charles R. Lampman, USN (Ret.) on the *Battles of Charleston, South Carolina* that was published in the *Sons of the American Revolution Magazine* (Winter 2005, Vol.XCXIX, No.3). A piece of the June 28, 1776 Battle of Charleston Harbor history can still be seen today, but not in a location where it might be expected.

The story begins in 1887 when a British steamer struck a sunken obstruction in Charleston Harbor. The captain of the vessel reported the accident to the U.S. authorities and a diver being sent down discovered a pile of cannon and shot. These artifacts were raised by the U.S. Corp of Engineers, placed on the dock, and ordered broken up and used as riprap in the harbor improvements then in progress. Attention was called to this fact by Captain John Carr Parker and through the kindness and assistance of Herman Klatt, a former Confederate Major, a series of relics were prevented from being returned to their watery grave in Charleston Harbor. The items, with the assistance of Captain Parker, were the purchased at auction by the Missouri Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS) and placed into the Commandery's museum. The MOLLUS was founded on the day that President Abraham Lincoln died, April 15, 1865. It was initially composed of Union Officers who served honorably during the American Civil War. It is today continued by the descendants of Civil War Union Officers.

The collection of artifacts recovered in the 1887 salvage operation were from the *HMS Actaeon* wreckage and included three cannons, two long Toms and a carronade, two bar shots used in cutting the rigging of an enemy's vessel, two round shots, and rust from the shot of the *HMS Actaeon*. Additional items that were added to the Missouri Commandery's museum collection included two pieces of copper torn from the prow of a British steamer that struck the *HMS Actaeon* in Charleston Harbor in 1887 and another shot that was fired into Charleston, South Carolina in May 1780 by Sir

Henry Clinton, commander of the British army at that time. The shot had passed through the side of a house on the corner of Brock and Meeting Streets, and remained buried in the cellar until 1890.



A brief history of the recovered relics is as follows. On the morning of June 28, 1776, the British fleet, under the command of Sir Peter Parker, Admiral, and consisting of eight vessels, two of them fifty gun ships, crossed the bar and advanced towards the city. The *HMS Actaeon*, a 28 guns frigate built in 1775, was one of three vessels assigned to enfilade the front of Fort Moultrie, but became grounded before taking up position. The British commander opened fire on Fort Moultrie and a brisk engagement followed, which lasted from 11 AM to near 9 PM. The *HMS Actaeon* could not be freed from her predicament and was set on fire and abandoned by the British. Seeing this, the Americans rushed aboard and turning the guns on the enemy fired broadside, set fire to a train to her magazine, and then retreated. The *HMS Actaeon* went down with her guns left in position until discovered 111 years afterwards.

Captain John Carr Parker served in the U.S. Navy during the Civil War and rose to the rank of Acting Volunteer Lieutenant. Following the Civil War, he became an original member of the MOLLUS. In 1885, Captain Parker became a charter member of the Missouri Commandery of the MOLLUS. The artifacts from the *HMS Actaeon* and Charleston Harbor were saved by Captain Parker and added to the Missouri Commandery's museum collection, where for many years they were on display at the Commandery's headquarters and for a time the cannons remained stored in the basement of the Exposition Building. Captain Parker also contributed a paper entitled, *A Night with Farragut*, to the Missouri Commandery's library collection. The paper is a first hand account of his experiences during the Civil War. In 1900, the library and museum collection of Missouri Commandery were said to be one of the greatest west of the Mississippi River. On October 30, 1897, the cannons were presented by the Missouri Commandery to the Commissioner of Lafayette Park in St. Louis, Missouri and have remained there on public display for the past 108 years.

MISSOURI SOCIETY OF THE
SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

St. Louis, October 25th, 1897.

COMPATRIOT:

The Missouri Commandery, Military Order of the Loyal Legion, has invited the Missouri Society of the S. A. R. to participate in the ceremonies of presenting to the Commissioners of Lafayette Park, 3 cannon from the British man-of-war, "Acteon," which was sunk in the harbor of Charleston, S. C., on June 28th, 1776, during an attack on Fort Moultrie, at 3 o'clock P. M. on SATURDAY, the 30th inst., at LAFAYETTE PARK.

Every member of the Society is cordially invited to be present.

By order of the Board of Managers,

JOHN L. BRUCE, Secretary.

Lafayette Park, named in honor of the Marquis de Lafayette (1757 - 1834), includes a statue of General George Washington, and is the site of annual Daughters of the American Revolution ceremonies on Washington's Birthday. The cannons are a unique feature of the park and are probably the most interesting relics found in any city west of the Mississippi River. The bronze guns are in good condition, but the 1930 stands and the carronade are deteriorating and will need to be replaced in the near future. The neighborhood is under continued restoration under the guidance of the Lafayette Square Restoration Committee.



Since 1995, the Missouri Commandery has used the Internet to help educate the public about the history of the United States. Additional information on the topic of this paper and other Commandery projects and programs may be found by visiting the homepage of the [Missouri Commandery, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States](http://www.mollus.org).



Source:

Records of the Missouri Commandery, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States

Additional online information:

Parks Division: Lafayette Park

http://stlouis.missouri.org/citygov/parks/parks_div/descript.html#lafayette

Lafayette Park

http://stlouis.missouri.org/citygov/parks/parks_div/lafayette.html

Revolutionary War Cannons Lafayette Park

http://stlouis.missouri.org/citygov/parks/parks_div/facilities/fountains.html

Sailing ships of the Royal Navy

<http://www.cronab.demon.co.uk/A1.htm>

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