

## It's Your History!

*The mission of the Missouri State Museum is to interpret Missouri's cultural and natural history, and to sustain them for its citizens and visitors through research, exhibitions, preservation and public outreach.*

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# Missouri State Museum

## The Museum Muse

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### A Prized Artifact: Sweet Gum Mortar



Sweet gum mortar in the Missouri State Museum's collection.

Many historians have studied the various artillery and weapons used during the American Civil War but there is one often forgotten piece of siege weaponry. The sweet gum mortar, sometimes called the sweet gum battery, played a major role in several Union victories toward the end of the Civil War. The Missouri State Museum has two of only three known to be still in existence.

The sweet gum mortar was constructed from what soldiers commonly called the sweet gum tree. (The museum's mortars are from red gum tree, a type of southern yellow pine.) For its construction, suitable trees were cut down and a hole was drilled in the middle of the tree. Two or three iron bands were fastened around the trunk, and an iron plate was attached with a hole in it for the wick of the mortar. Mortars were generally built as 12-pounders, but 6-pounders and 24-pounders also were constructed. The shell was covered in turpentine to carry the flame to the fuse, and the charge for the mortar was ordinary rifle powder. The mortars were generally placed on a wooden frame made of the same material and were often used in pits dug on the trenches of the advance lines. The weapons proved quite practical because they could be made from the trees that grew in the immediate area of the battle.

The practice of using sweet gum mortars arose out of a desperate need for siege weapons that occurred in many battles. These mortars substituted for the commonly used Coehorn mortar that was made of metal and generally considered a higher quality weapon. Sometimes called wooden Coehorn mortars, the sweet gum mortars were surprisingly useful in their role. Union Gen. and future President Ulysses S. Grant mentioned how they were "exceedingly effective." Operated by a two-man crew, the sweet gum mortars had a maximum range of 500 to 600 yards but were often placed 50 to 75 yards away from the enemy in advance trenches. One account describes a single shell

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## From The Director

In December 2013, I was able to spend some time doing research on Missouri's history for a "Museum after Hours" program on 19th-century communications technology in the museum's collection. Sometimes, it's nice to remember why we're here – to preserve and interpret the amazing and diverse cultural and natural history of Missouri.



Early display at Missouri State Museum

Most museums have only a small percentage of their artifacts on display at any given time, and the Missouri State Museum is no exception. In order to preserve them for future generations, many types of artifacts "need a rest" from things like light exposure. In addition, this allows the museum to tell many more "stories" of Missouri than the limited exhibit space allows. With the end of the sesquicentennial of the Civil War in sight, museum staff are already planning "what comes next" when the "Civil War Missouri" exhibit closes in mid-2015. There are many more stories to tell, and museum staff are designing the next exhibit, to open partially in 2016, to allow for more flexibility to change the stories and include more of those stories. It will also be a space for more interpretive programming that enhances and expands on what is in the exhibits. Over the next few years, museum staff will be seeking public input on what "Missouri" means – for both its cultural history and its diverse natural resources. After all, "it's your history."

*Linda Sundersley*

## Collections Corner

### An Unusually Fun Find in the St. Louis World's Fair Collection

When staff first began working with the St. Louis World's Fair Collection (donated by Melvin and Ronald Getlan), they discovered that it is unusually rich with interesting objects. Recently, they began writing up very short features on some of the quirkiest objects (called "Fun Artifacts of the Day") and posted on our Facebook page. One artifact in particular deserves a little bit more attention.

While cataloging a series of pocket watches, staff stumbled upon an object that looked like a pocket watch but didn't have a watch face. This object was slightly larger than the other pocket watches and had some unusual buttons and dials that did not fit our expectation for a timepiece. So, following a little research into the company that had marked the object with its patent, it was

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Spy Camera

# Interpretive Programming



Interpreter Stan Maxson leading the group

## “Tuesdays@2”

Exciting news! . . . The State Museum will be changing the way we do our “Tuesdays@2” programming for this summer and offer different programs for two different age groups. The age groups will be five to eight and nine to 13 years of age. Staff will try to keep the same topic for each program but the way it will be presented and the theme will vary. More information will be available in the spring. Keep an eye out on our website or contact us after March for the times at 573-751-2854 or email [DSP.State.Museum@dnr.mo.gov](mailto:DSP.State.Museum@dnr.mo.gov). We are looking forward to this year’s programming and can’t wait to see everyone.

## Outreach Programs

Staff are currently offering four different outreach programs for schools and groups. These programs are “A Day in the Life of a Civil War Soldier;” “Packing for the Oregon Trail;” “Signal Flags of the Civil War;” and “The Pony Express.” While the programs target fourth and fifth graders, staff can adapt some of these for general audiences.

For any questions or to schedule a program, please email [DSP.State.Museum@dnr.mo.gov](mailto:DSP.State.Museum@dnr.mo.gov) or call 573-751-2854.

## We want to hear from you

The education staff at the museum would like to know what interests you for future programs. Maybe you are a homeschool group and need a certain program for your curriculum. Maybe you are a civic group that would like a guest speaker. As long as staff can associate the program with the museum, we can help you fulfill your needs. Please contact us at 573-751-2854 or [DSP.State.Museum@dnr.mo.gov](mailto:DSP.State.Museum@dnr.mo.gov).

## Dates to Remember:

- Jan. 8—Museum After Hours: “Rocks of Ages”
- Feb. 5—Museum After Hours: “Born in a Barn”
- March 1—Lohman Building and Union Hotel open for the season.
- March 5—Museum After Hours :“Missouri Spring Mushrooms”
- April 2—Museum After Hours: “Thomas Hart Benton”



# Exhibits

## **“Show Me the Fair: Souvenirs and Remembrances of the 1904 World’s Fair”**

**March 1 - Aug. 30, 2014**

**Elizabeth Rozier Gallery  
101 Jefferson St.  
Jefferson City, Mo.**

This spring, the Rozier Gallery will showcase selections from the Missouri State Museum’s extensive collection of St. Louis World’s Fair memorabilia. Come for a fun look at the trinkets, toys and tales that survived the fleeting existence of the fair. For seven months, April 30 to Nov. 30, 1904, the Show-Me state showed off. Travelers visited St. Louis to marvel at innovations and inventions from around the world.

To remember their trip to the 1,200-acre fair, visitors bought and brought home all manner of keepsakes. This exhibit will highlight photographs, quotes and mementos that capture the feeling of the fair. Come see some of the spectacle that was the 1904 World’s Fair.



Family on the Pike 1904

## **“Missouri Made”**

**March 6 - June 30, 2014**

**Lambert-St. Louis  
International Airport  
St Louis, Mo.  
“Meeting Place Gallery,”  
Terminal 1, Concourse C**

Missouri State Parks is excited to present “Missouri Made,” an exhibit highlighting the

Missouri State Museum’s varied and unique collection. Exploring five themes in five cases, the objects include raw materials of industry, one-of-a-kind crafts and goods manufactured throughout the state for the last 150 years. Featuring the crafts and skills of Missourians, this exhibit explores ideas of individual creativity and mass production and showcases examples of unexpected beauty found within Missouri’s natural resources.



“Missouri Made” Can you guess what they are?



## Collections Corner

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discovered that it is a spy camera! Since the patent on the object is from September 1904, the object may not be a World's Fair souvenir artifact. However, the camera may have been displayed by a vendor during the fair like many other new products.



Top view lens

On this camera, the winding stem houses the lens. The shutter release button is just below and to the left of the stem. The user could slide a tab along a slot on the side to adjust shutter times. There is a dial on the reverse that winds the film. With this camera, a person could quickly take photographs, and, at a distance, it would appear that he or she

was just checking the time.

Magnus Neill was the Swedish inventor who patented the Expo camera, and, for over 30 years, his designs were the most popular watch-form cameras sold. One later patent of the British version of this camera (produced by Houghton's Limited) includes a significant improvement; in 1914, Neill added a watch face to the camera.



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## Special Missouri State Museum Event at the Lambert-St. Louis International Airport

### "Missouri Made"

*March 6 - June 30, 2014, in St. Louis*

The Missouri State Museum will highlight its varied and unique collection at the Lambert-St. Louis International Airport. This exhibit was selected by the Airport Art Advisory Committee (AAAC) as one of four exhibits on display in 2014 at the airport's Meeting Place Gallery. The gallery is located at the passenger pick-up area in Lambert Airport's Terminal 1 near the exit for Concourse C.

Exploring five themes in five cases, the objects in the exhibit include raw materials of industry, one-of-a-kind crafts and goods manufactured throughout Missouri for the last 150 years. Featuring the crafts and skills of Missourians, this exhibit explores ideas of individual creativity and mass production and showcases examples of unexpected beauty found within Missouri's natural resources.

**“Lohman’s Landing”**  
**March 1 - Aug. 30, 2014**

**Lohman Building**  
**100 Jefferson St.**  
**Jefferson City, Mo.**

In 2014, the Lohman Building will mark its 175th anniversary and will celebrate its significance as a Missouri River landing. The exhibits will provide an interactive experience of an 1850s general store and warehouse.

In addition, beginning March 1, 2014, the Lohman Building will also be a retail space and feature Missouri-made items and historic toys.

Museum staff will present short programs about such topics as the store’s importance to travelers during Westward expansion, the role of the Missouri River in commerce and transportation, or what the store meant to local people as the main retail store of its time.

The 17-minute movie, “The City of Jefferson,” is still available to view while visiting.



Stocked shelves  
at the Lohman  
Building



Warehouse in the  
Lohman Building



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from a sweet gum mortar killing 18 Confederate soldiers. While effective, they were wooden and fragile, usually offering only 24 to 36 hours of use before they would give way or explode. Yet, their practicality, effectiveness and accuracy made these mortars a favorite of the soldiers who used them. Some soldiers began calling them the “Beer Keg Battery” due to their appearance.

The sweet gum mortar made its battlefield debut at the Siege of Vicksburg in 1863. During the battle, a request for siege weapons and Coehorn mortars was sent to Union suppliers but the supplies never came. Desperate for mortars, Chief Engineer Lt. Peter C. Hains of the 13<sup>th</sup> U.S. Army Corps of Engineers gave the order for his men to chop down the local sweet gum trees and fashion wooden



Sweet gum mortar on display in “Civil War Missouri: A House Dividing” Exhibit

mortars out of them. Two 12-pounders and one 6-pounder were constructed and placed in advance trenches. During the course of the battle, 102 6-pounder rounds and 366 12-pounder rounds were fired from the three sweet gum mortars, leading to a Union victory. According to Confederate casualty reports, 21 men were killed and 72 were wounded as a result of these wooden mortars.

While no other wooden mortar was able to match the effectiveness of the sweet gum mortar,

several imitations were attempted during the course of the Civil War. During the Battle of Knoxville in Tennessee, a 24-pounder wooden mortar made from a white oak tree was built by the Confederates under the command of Capt. William H. Harris. During the test fire, a 24-pound howitzer shell and 7 ounces of rifle powder were used, and it fired perfectly. However, when it was attempted in combat with the same size shell and 16 ounces of rifle powder, the mortar burst into two and was destroyed. Another attempt at wooden mortars took place during the Siege of Petersburg in 1864 when Confederate troops made several 12-pounder wooden mortars from oak trees. These mortars proved to be both dangerous and ineffective; they exploded often and were very inaccurate.

In 1865, sweet gum mortars were used for the last time in combat during the Mobile Campaign in the areas surrounding Mobile, Ala. In the final weeks of the war, Union forces used the mortars at the siege of Spanish Fort and Fort Blakely to take the Confederate city of Mobile. During the course of the siege of Spanish Fort, six 12-pounder mortars were constructed because of a lack of Coehorn mortars. The sweet gum mortars proved to be so essential and effective to the course of the battle that Brig. Gen. John McArthur ordered six more 12-pounders and one 24-pounder to be built. (There is no record that the

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24-pounder was ever used.) After Spanish Fort fell, the sweet gum mortars were used again to capture Fort Blakely, the last Confederate defense for the city of Mobile. Once both Spanish Fort and Fort Blakely were defeated, Union forces were able to take the Confederate hold-out city of Mobile on April 12, 1865 – three days after Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant. This battle marks the last time sweet gum mortars were ever used for combat purposes.

Soon after Mobile, Ala., fell to Union forces, the troops moved to Montgomery, Ala., where they learned of the surrender of Robert E. Lee and the end of the war. With the war over, several arsenals and depots were established across the South where weapons, including the surviving sweet gum mortars, were turned in to authorities. At these locations, many of the weapons and cannons used during the war were broken up and their parts sold. Seven sweet gum mortars remained in existence at the end of the war; they were all 12-pounders from the Mobile Campaign. Soldiers who had used them and considered

them their favorites took the surviving seven. Colonel W.R. Marshall of the 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota took one, and the 8<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin “Eagle Regiment” took another one. George Patrick Garland of Company F of the 33rd Missouri Infantry Volunteers took two (including one he used during the war). The other three were taken by other regiments. The 7<sup>th</sup> Minnesota later donated their sweet gum mortar to the Minnesota Historical Society where it remains today (except for the wooden base that was destroyed in an 1881 fire). The location of the mortar given to the 8<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin and the other three are unknown and they are presumed to be lost or destroyed.



“War Relics in the Adjutant-General’s Office, Jefferson City, Missouri,”  
Harper’s Weekly, July 6, 1867

remains today (except for the wooden base that was destroyed in an 1881 fire). The location of the mortar given to the 8<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin and the other three are unknown and they are presumed to be lost or destroyed.

Following the war, George Patrick Garland sent the two sweet gum mortars he received back home to Missouri. The Missouri Adjutant General’s Office displayed them along with other “relics” from the war, including Civil War battle flags, as depicted in the illustration above from 1867. The mortars and other artifacts became part of the Missouri State Museum collection after its founding in 1919 as the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Memorial Hall. Museum staff interviewed Garland in the 1930s to reveal the mortars’ history and their important role in the Civil War. Before the war, Garland was a musician and later worked as an editor for his hometown newspaper, the *Otterville Mail*. He passed away on March 4, 1939, at the age of 96.

The mortars Garland sent home, including the one that he used during the war, are two of the only three surviving sweet gum mortars of the Civil War known to exist. One is currently on display in the Missouri State Museum’s “Civil War Missouri: A House Dividing” exhibit through May 2015.

## Jefferson Landing State Historic Site

100 & 101 Jefferson St.



The Lohman Building will reopen March 1, 2014. Come help us celebrate the building's 175th birthday!



The Union Hotel will reopen March 1, 2014, with an exhibit on the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis.

*Interested in supporting the Missouri State Museum?  
Contact the Friends of the Missouri State Museum  
and become a member today!*

*Find them at  
Friendsofmsm.org or on  
Facebook.*



## What Am I?

Try to Identify the object from the picture. This item can be found in the museum. The answer will appear in the next newsletter. Good Luck.



***Last Issue's "What Am I?" Answer:  
Type 99 Japanese Grenade found in the  
Missouri Veteran's Gallery***

## State Museum Staff

Linda Endersby, Director  
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For more information, contact the Missouri State Museum at 573-751-2854 or [DSP.State.Museum@dnr.mo.gov](mailto:DSP.State.Museum@dnr.mo.gov). Find out more on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/missouristatemuseum) and at [missouristatemuseum.com](http://missouristatemuseum.com).

