

The Sundial at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis

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Jefferson Barracks occupies a beautiful site of 1,702 acres overlooking the Mississippi River in St. Louis, MO. It has an important history dating from its establishment on July 8, 1826 as the primary training site for the Army of the West. The site was first named Cantonment Miller to honor Missouri Governor John Miller; the name was changed to Jefferson Barracks in Oct. 1826 to honor President Thomas Jefferson, who had died on July 4 of that year [1, pp. 10, 14]. During the Civil War, Jefferson Barracks served the Union Army as a major medical facility. Important military and political leaders in U. S. history had duty assignments at Jefferson Barracks early in their careers, including Braxton Bragg, Jefferson Davis, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Ulysses E. Grant, Robert E. Lee, John J. Pershing, William T. Sherman, Zachary Taylor, and many others. Jefferson Barracks was the largest U. S. military post in 1843. A national cemetery was established at Jefferson Barracks in 1866. In 1912 at Jefferson Barracks, Albert Berry made the first successful parachute jump from an airplane. During 1917 to 1918, Jefferson Barracks became the largest U. S. induction and demobilization center for WWI troops. Jefferson Barracks was closed in 1946 by the U. S. military and was declared surplus property. The grounds are presently divided into four independent institutions: the northern most section of the post was ceded to St. Louis County in 1950 and is now a public park; the Veterans Administration Hospital has occupied 217 acres since 1922 when the Veterans Administration was established and has provided continuous medical service to military personnel and veterans since 1862 when the hospital was established as the Federal Army's Medical Department; a burial place for Civil War soldiers who died in the hospital became one of the first National Cemeteries in 1866 and continues to be a burial place for veterans; and, part of the original post is now a base managed by the U. S. Air Force for the Missouri Air National Guard. Access to this latter portion of the Jefferson Barracks is restricted.

An administration building, dating from the completion of its construction in 1900, lies on a rise at the East end of the parade grounds of the base. One of the oldest landmarks on the base is a sundial installed in 1841. It served as the official post chronometer for many years. The sundial is located at the rear of the administration building. The Mississippi river provides a beautiful backdrop to the site, with the St. Louis Jefferson Memorial (the Arch) visible 10 miles away. Shown in Fig. 1 is the original sundial viewed looking towards the West in the 1890s [1, p.98; 2]. Shown in Fig. 2 is picture of that sundial taken circa WWI. The dial rests on a limestone pedestal surrounded by an iron fence. The Mississippi River is seen in the background; the cannon in the foreground, aimed low towards the Mississippi River, was brought to Jefferson Barracks in 1899. This is a highly treasured trophy of the Spanish American War recovered from the Spanish battleship *Oquenda* that was sunk in Santiago Bay on July 3, 1898. Many troops from Jefferson Barracks participated in that war. This original sundial was built at the St. Louis Arsenal, now designated the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, located about six miles north of the Jefferson Barracks.

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Shortly after WWII, all of Jefferson Barracks was open to the public. Early during this period, around 1946, the original sundial was stolen, but the pedestal and surrounding fence were left intact. A replacement for the dial was made at the Arsenal and installed on the original pedestal. Fig. 3 is a picture of the dial taken in April, 2008. A view of the dial plate on April 2, 2008 at about 1:30 PM CDT is in Fig. 4.

The limestone pedestal is about 30 inches in height. The dial plate shown in Fig. 4 is made of bronze and is 14 inches in diameter.

It is interesting to note that furniture on the dial plate in Fig. 4 is similar to that on the dial plate of the Mary Harrison Leighton Shields dial that is near the Jewel Box in the St. Louis Forest Park, as seen in Fig. 5. The correspondence between the two dials of the winged hour-glass and the hour-line markings suggests that both dials were made at the St. Louis Arsenal by the same person, but up to now, we have not been able to verify this.

Access to the base is restricted, so advance arrangements must be made to view the Jefferson Barracks sundial. Contact Mr. Arthur Schuermann, Jefferson Barracks Historian, by e-mail (arthur.schuermann@mostlo.af.mil) or telephone (314-527-8369) to make an arrangement to be escorted onto the base to view the sundial.

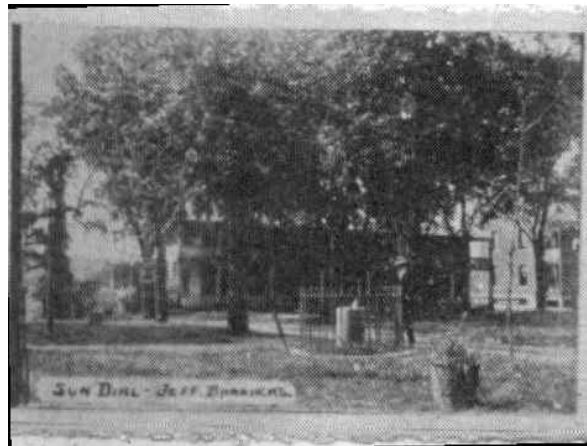


Figure 1. Original Jefferson Barracks sundial, seen looking towards the West in the 1890s.



Figure 2. Original Jefferson Barracks sundial viewed looking towards the Southeast cWWI



Figure 3. Jefferson Barracks sundial, seen looking East in April, 2008



Figure 4. The dial plate (picture taken April 2, 2008 at about 1:30 PM CDT)



Figure 5. Mary Harrison Leighton Shields sundial near the Jewel Box in Forest Park, St. Louis

References

1. M. E. Kollbaum, *Gateway to the West: The History of Jefferson Barracks from 1826 to 1894*, published by the Friends of Jefferson Barracks, 533 Grant Road, St. Louis, MO 63125-4121.
2. The Willie Daly Scrapbook, c1910, St. Louis, MO
<http://www.usgennet.org/usa/mo/county/stlouis/scrap/daly.htm>