

Alexander Doniphan Walking Tour

Length: About 1.8 miles

Start: The tour begins at the marker on the east side of N. Main Street at the Presbyterian Church Park (corner of North Main and Mississippi Streets). Park on North Main Street or in one of the free parking lots near the square.

Alexander William Doniphan (July 9, 1808-August 8, 1887) was one of Liberty's most influential citizens. His life spanned a crucial time in Liberty's, and America's, early history. His influence made an impact on several fronts. We hope you will end this tour with a deepened appreciation of how one person can make a lasting impact.

Born on July 9, 1808, in Mason County, Kentucky, Alexander William Doniphan was the youngest of 10 children. His father, Joseph, who died when Alexander was about five years old, was a teacher and friend of Daniel Boone. Alexander and fellow Kentuckian Abraham Lincoln were born one year apart. Coincidentally, both men grew to be 6'4" tall.

Both of Alexander's grandfathers participated in the American Revolution. Alexander graduated from Augusta College at Bracken, Kentucky at the age of 18, then studied law in the office of Martin Marshall.

On this tour you will visit the locations in Liberty that help tell the story of how this one man impacted, and was impacted by, Liberty and western Missouri more than 150 years ago.

1. Doniphan's First Home

In 1829, at the age of 21, the young lawyer made his way up the Missouri River to Lexington, where he began his law career. In 1833, he moved to Liberty where he began a law practice that spanned 30 years. During this period, Liberty was an outpost of civilization, and being near Ft. Leavenworth, it served as the social, educational and cultural center of the area.

A Missouri Mormon Frontier Foundation sign marks the site of the first home of Alexander Doniphan and his bride Elizabeth Jane Thornton, a daughter of Colonel John Thornton. They were married in December, 1837, on Elizabeth's 17th birthday. The couple had two sons, John Thornton and Alexander William. Due to unusual accidents, both died in their teens.

Doniphan always served as a defense attorney, never as a prosecutor, and was noted for his oratorical skills. He served in the State Legislature in 1836, 1840, and 1854 as a member of the Whig party, and was an admirer and supporter of Henry Clay.

As a young defense attorney, Alexander Doniphan was hired by members of the Mormon Church to defend their rights to settle in Missouri. As a member of the state legislature, he assisted in the creation of Caldwell County for the Mormons. Clashes between Mormons and non-Mormons continued and escalated, however, until governor Lilburn Boggs issued his "Extermination Order", directing that the Mormons be exterminated or driven from the state.

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Walk north about 100 yards to the Historic Liberty Jail on the northwest corner of Mississippi and N. Main Streets.

Inside the Historic Liberty Jail you can see the original key to the jail in the foyer. The Liberty Jail has been rebuilt in a cutaway style. This helps you visualize the prisoners' cramped and gloomy quarters. The Historic Liberty Jail is owned and operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and is free and open to the public, 365 days a year.

2. Friend to the Mormons

Doniphan excelled in law, but he is chiefly remembered for his military career. By 1838, he had risen to the rank of brigadier general in the state militia. He led a large force of state troops against the Mormons, despite his efforts to avoid conflict with them. When Mormon prophet Joseph Smith was arrested by General Samuel Lucas and court martialed for treason, Lucas ordered Doniphan to execute Smith and other Mormon leaders. Doniphan refused and promised that if the Mormons were executed, he would see that the General would be prosecuted in the courts for Murder. General Lucas spared the Mormons and sent them instead to the Liberty Jail.

The Historic Liberty Jail is where Joseph Smith and five other Mormon leaders were held from December 1838 to April 1839. They were helpless while knowing that the Latter-day Saints were being driven from Missouri under the "extermination order" from the governor. The jail was a rough stone dungeon measuring 14 by 14 feet, with a ceiling just over 6 feet high. Only two

small barred windows allowed light and air into the cell. They suffered from winter weather, filthy conditions, hunger, and sickness.

While waiting for trial, Smith and his followers were allowed to escape custody and left the state, moving on to Nauvoo, Illinois. Doniphan is credited with saving the lives of Smith and his followers, and is still highly esteemed by Mormons.

For the next stop on the tour, walk south on Main Street, about 100 yards, to the marker on the west side of N. Main Street next to the Presbyterian Church.

3. Doniphan's Second Home

From about 1830 until 1925 a house stood on this site, where Doniphan once lived. At other times the house was occupied by Peter H. Burnett, the first governor of California, and for many years the Hubbell family.

Walk south on Main Street, take a left on Franklin Street, and cross to the center of the square. At the northwest corner of the Old Courthouse, you will see the Freedom Fountain.

4. Doniphan as a Slaveholder

The Liberty Freedom Fountain, presented by Clay County African-American Legacy, Inc in 2000, commemorates the accomplishments of African-Americans in Clay County's history and is near the location where slaves were regularly purchased and sold prior to the Civil War.

Doniphan was a slaveholder, and supported the pro-slavery movement in Kansas and

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Missouri, but did not participate in the raids into Kansas. He is believed to have provided "Old Sacramento," a cannon he brought back from Mexico for the "Sacking of Lawrence" in May 1856. He was also a director of the Clay County Pro-Slavery Aid Association, which raised funds for southerners who wanted to go to Kansas to further the pro-slavery cause.

Eventually, Doniphan advocated the gradual elimination of slavery only after it became apparent that the Republican Party and President Lincoln would make emancipation immediate.

(Interesting note: Abraham Lincoln received no votes in Clay County in the Presidential Election of 1860.)

Doniphan strongly opposed secession and favored neutrality for Missouri. Doniphan's position on Missouri's secession was in the "Conditional Unionist" camp. He was among those southern men who believed Missouri should resist coercion by the North, which forced seceding states back into the Union. They hoped Missouri could remain in the Union through a compromise that would provide a Constitutional guarantee for the South.

Early in 1861, Doniphan rallied about 6000 people in Liberty while he spoke from the Courthouse steps for two hours imploring Missourians to remain in the Union.

Doniphan went to the Washington Peace Conference in February 1861 but came away frustrated by its inability to hold the Union together.

Doniphan was offered a high command by the Union Army. He did not take an active part in the Civil War, likely because he did not want to fight against some of the same men he had led to Mexico fifteen years before, most of whom sided with the Confederates.

Doniphan instead relocated to St. Louis in 1863 to escape the political conflict in Liberty.

On Franklin Street, cross Water Street and walk six blocks to the steps leading to Jewell Hall. (If you prefer not to walk, you will still have a good view of Jewell Hall from the Square.)

5. Friend of Education

Doniphan was named the first Clay County superintendent of schools in 1853. Prior to that, he had a crucial role in the founding of William Jewell College.

In 1843, Dr. William Jewell a physician, legislator, and Baptist layman from Columbia, Missouri, offered \$10,000 in land to start a Baptist college. His offer was declined because the Baptists were not well organized at that time. Jewell renewed the offer in 1848, and by that time the Baptists were eager to open a college. On February 27, 1849, the Missouri legislature granted a charter which created the first four-year men's college west of the Mississippi.

Jewell had stipulated that the college be in mid-Missouri.

Many towns in Missouri wanted the college, but residents of Clay County - led by Mexican War hero Alexander Doniphan -

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succeeded in bringing the college to Liberty. Doniphan closed his law practice and personally traveled around Clay County soliciting subscriptions of \$48 each as an incentive for the new college to locate in Liberty. Doniphan was not a Baptist, nor a member of any other church at the time. Due to Doniphan's influence, however, the college was named in honor of its original benefactor, William Jewell.

In addition to Jewell and Doniphan, one of the founding members of the college's Board of Trustees was the Reverend Robert James. James was a Baptist minister who had also made a financial commitment to the new college, but soon followed fellow church members to California for the Gold Rush. Rev. Surprisingly, it was James' sons, Frank and Jesse, who eventually made good on their father's financial pledge to the college.

Dr. Jewell was engaged to supervise the construction of the first college building and, in fact, died from heatstroke while Jewell Hall was being built. Jewell Hall remains the centerpiece of the campus.

Walk back to the square, and then left (south) on Water Street two blocks until you see the ceramic murals on the side of the Clay County Public Safety building. In the center is the Clay County War Memorial.

6. War Hero

This war memorial shows the white doves of Anguish (on the left) and Serenity (on the right). Flanked by the white doves, soldiers from Missouri in all the great wars remind us of the price freedom. As the North

gestures to the South, the fallow image of Colonel Alexander Doniphan and his entourage march into history.

In 1846, the war between the U.S. and Mexico was in full swing and Doniphan enlisted, along with others from Clay County. Up and down the Missouri River, volunteers from each county enlisted and reported to Ft. Leavenworth. Doniphan was commissioned a Colonel of the 1st Regiment of Missouri Mounted Volunteers and he then led his men on the march to Santa Fe, under the command of General Stephen Kearny.

Thereafter, he was ordered to march south to Mexico with his regiment, composed of about 1000 men. A short battle was fought north of present-day El Paso, Texas and then they set out on a long march of about 300 miles to capture Chihuahua. In February, 1847, just north of that city, the Battle of the Sacramento River was fought, where Doniphan's forces overcame about 5000 Mexican soldiers and captured the city.

The men returned from the Gulf of Mexico via New Orleans by boat to a hero's welcome. Doniphan's campaign ended one year after it began, and a march of more than 5,500 miles. It is considered the longest march in military history since Alexander the Great crossed the Alps.

After the Mexican War, Alexander Doniphan was appointed by General Kearny to construct the code of civil laws known as the "Kearny code" in English and Spanish for the territory annexed from Mexico.

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Walk south on Water Street ½ block to Mill Street. Turn right on Mill Street and then left on Gallatin and walk about four blocks to Shrader Street. Turn right on Shrader and you will see Fairview Cemetery, the final resting place of Alexander Doniphan. Look for the Doniphan obelisk near the cemetery's Rachel Street (which runs parallel with Shrader).

7. Doniphan Returns to Liberty One Last Time

In 1863, Doniphan had moved from Liberty to St. Louis. Since he was a strong Unionist and many of his friends and clients were Southern sympathizers, he could not resolve the conflicts within himself so he lived in St. Louis during that period. After the war, Doniphan moved back to western Missouri, but not to Liberty. He settled during his later years in Ray County, and there, in the town of Richmond, he engaged in banking and the practice of law until his death on August 8, 1887.

He was finally returned to Liberty when he, along with his wife and family members, were buried in Liberty's Fairview Cemetery.

In 1912, through the efforts of the Alexander Doniphan Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), the United States flag was hoisted above the Clay County Courthouse for the first time in more than 50 years. The DAR also placed a flag at the public school the same year.

If you are ever in Richmond, Missouri, look for the life-sized statue of Doniphan on the Courthouse lawn, erected in 1918.

To return to the square, retrace your steps to Gallatin Street. Walk north about four blocks to Kansas Street, then turn right (east) one block until you reach the square.

Hope you enjoyed this tour of Alexander Doniphan's life and your visit to Liberty!

References:

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