

## Self-Guided Tour to the Battle of Westport near Brush Creek

By Dick Titterington, aka theCivilWarMuse

### Introduction

The Battle of the Westport took place over a three day period in October 1864. It was Sunday, October 23, 1864 when two commanders, Jo Shelby and Sam Curtis, faced each other in and around present day Loose Park. Most of the battlefield has been swallowed by the growth of Kansas City, Missouri. But if you are willing to use your imagination, you can walk around what was the battlefield and get a feel for the conditions faced by the men who fought in this battle.

### Prologue

The three day Battle of Westport began around 8:00 a.m. on October 21, 1864 at the Little Blue River and continued until midafternoon on October 23 on the prairie south of Westport. Due to the number of soldiers involved, the Battle of Westport was the largest battle west of the Mississippi River during the American Civil War. It was also a decisive victory for the Union. For these reasons, some have given the battle a nickname, "The Gettysburg of the West."

The confrontation at Westport was the result of a three-year long quest by Missouri Confederates to take their state back from the Federal occupying forces. Major General Sterling Price wanted to lead once last attempt to reclaim his home state of Missouri for the Confederacy. On September 19, 1864, Price led an army of 12,000 cavalry into southeastern Missouri. Over the next month Price's Army of Missouri left a path of destruction in his wake as he headed west towards Kansas.

The Federal commander in Kansas, Major General Samuel R. Curtis, had heard the invasions rumors and had kept in touch with the Federal commander in Missouri, Major General William S. Rosecrans. By the end of September, Curtis had convinced the Governor of Kansas to call out the state militia. Curtis also ordered his second-in-command, Major General James G. Blunt, to bring his veteran cavalry troops east to the Missouri border.

With Price headed his way, General Curtis readied his defenses. Curtis had around 17,000 Kansas State Militia arrayed along the Missouri border. Curtis ordered Blunt into Missouri with about 2,000 veteran cavalry. Blunt reached Lexington the day before Price's



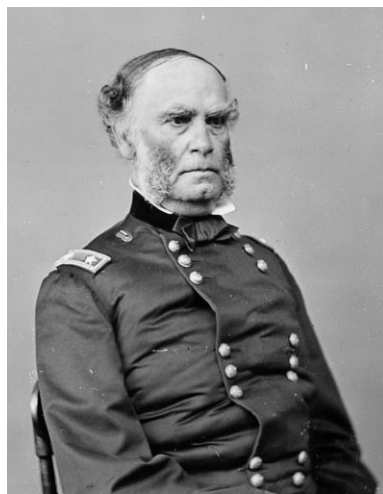
Sterling Price

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advance did. Blunt was trying to buy time for Curtis to complete the Federal defense line back near Kansas City. Curtis had decided to set up his main line of defense along the Big Blue River just east of Kansas City and Westport.

The Big Blue [River] should be a first main line of battle, Kansas City a second, and finally, if overpowered, Wyandotte, on the north side of the Kansas River ... I directed my chief engineer to construct field works at each of these positions.

Around 11:00 a.m. on October 19, the Confederate advance ran into the Federal pickets just south and east of Lexington. Skirmishing took place as the Federals fell back and prepared to defend the bridge over the Little Blue River on the Independence to Lexington Road. On October 21, the Confederates attacked the Federals on the Little Blue River and drove them all the way through Independence to the Big Blue River. That night Price's army encamped in and around Independence. His wagon train of plunder and supplies contained between 500 and 600 wagons. On October 22, Price planned to force a crossing of the Big Blue River at Byram's Ford on the Independence to Westport Road.



Samuel R. Curtis

By nightfall on October 22, the Confederate attack had succeeded. Curtis had fallen back to Westport and Kansas City, and Price now controlled Byram's Ford. Price sent word back to the wagon train to start moving towards Byram's Ford. Shortly after midnight, most of the wagons had crossed Byram's Ford and were heading south down the Harrisonville Road towards the town of New Santa Fe.

With the wagon train safely away, the Confederate rear guard pulled out of Independence and withdrew to the Big Blue River. That night General Sterling Price devised a new plan for October 23. In the morning, Shelby's Division, supported by Fagan's Division, was going to attack the Federals in Westport. Marmaduke's Division was going to man the defenses along the Big Blue River at Byram's Ford and hold off the Federal cavalry in their rear while the wagon train got safely away.

### The Tour

The self-guided tour is a walking tour, although many of the tour stops can be reached by car. We strongly recommend you wear good walking shoes. All walking from one tour stop to the next is over paved sidewalks or streets. The complete walking tour covers about 3.5 to 4 miles, and there are a few stretches of walking up or down some pretty steep hills. We hope you enjoy your tour of the Battle of Westport around Loose Park.

## Self-Guided Tour to the Battle of Westport near Loose Park

### **Tour Stop, “Loose Park”**

#### *Directions*

[Waypoint = 39.034099 -94.592743]

This tour stop is located about one block south of the intersection of E 51<sup>st</sup> Street and Wornall Road. There is a semi-circular parking area in the northeast corner of Loose Park in Kansas City, Missouri.

#### *Description*

This stop is just a jumping off point for walking to other tour stops.

### **Tour Stop, “Federals Advance up Hill”**

#### *Directions*

[Waypoint = 39.037786 -94.591799]

This tour stop is located on a raised patio area overlooking the intersection of Wornall Road and E 49<sup>th</sup> Terrace.

Leave your car and walk over to Wornall Road and then north to E 51<sup>st</sup> Street. Cross over to the east side of Wornall Road and continue walking north on Wornall Road. After one block or so, veer to the right of a stone divider. Continue walking due north past E 50<sup>th</sup> Street. When the pavement next turns to the right, continue straight onto the brick sidewalk. Continue walking for another 50 yards or so until get opposite to E 49<sup>th</sup> Terrace. Walk over to the edge of the patio and look out down below onto Wornall Road.

#### *Description*

Even though you are surrounded by the city, you can get a fair view of the terrain. To the north is Brush Creek, a 10.5 mile long stream flowing west to east and emptying into the Big Blue River. Over time this creek has cut a 100 to 150 foot deep valley into the loess and glacial till that sits atop the limestone of Jackson County.

Also to the north you can see the Plaza and even a bit of Westport. Look to the south and you get a feel for the steepness of the hill up to the plateau on which Loose Park sits. Consider that in 1864 Wornall Lane was not much of a road and the grade was a lot steeper back then.

After Shelby’s Division broke through the Federal defenses on the Big Blue River on October 22, Major General Samuel R. Curtis had to scramble to realign his forces back at his second line of defense in Kansas City. That night the Kansas State Militia manned the earthwork defense that had been thrown up around the perimeter of the city (present day Locust on the east and 14<sup>th</sup> Street on the south). Curtis held a council of war at the Gillis House Hotel located on the Missouri River in Kansas City. When the council ended around 3:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, Curtis decided to attack at daylight.

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His second-in-command, Major General James G. Blunt, was in command of a Provisional Cavalry Division of veteran Federal volunteers. Before the council of war, Blunt had left orders for his four brigades to resupply themselves with food and ammunition. Now he ordered them to move to their jumping off points. Colonel Charles R. Jennison's First Brigade moved south of Westport in the area of the present day Plaza. Colonel James H. Ford's Fourth Brigade deployed to the east on Jennison's left. Colonel Thomas Moonlight's Second Brigade had spent the night in Kansas near Shawnee and now deployed to the state line to block Price from entering Kansas. Colonel Charles W. Blair's Third Brigade set up near Westport to support Jennison and Ford. Blunt wrote about these events in his official report.

All of the night of the 22d was occupied in getting ammunition and subsistence to my command, with the view of commencing the attack upon the enemy at daylight the following morning. Daylight on the morning of the 23d revealed the enemy in force on the open prairie directly south of Westport and about two miles distant.

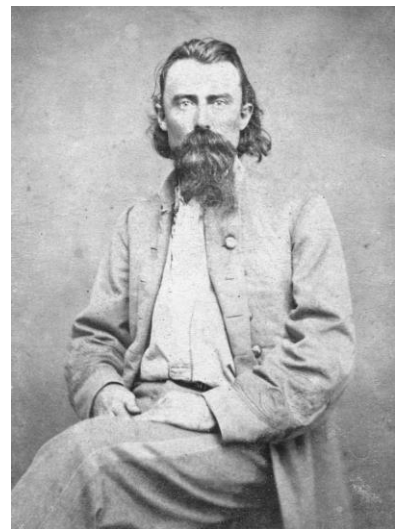
Confederate Brigadier General Joseph O. Shelby's Division had spent the night about a mile or so south of present day Loose Park. Price's council of war had taken place at the Boston Adams' House near present day Swope Parkway and Meyer Boulevard. In the morning Jo Shelby was to move north and attack the Federals in Westport. He would be supported on his right by Major General James F. Fagan's Division, but Shelby knew he would be doing most of the fighting on Sunday. When the day began, Shelby was optimistic things would go well and later wrote about that morning.

The 23d of October dawned upon us clear, cold, and full of promise.

Price's wagon train was on its way south down the Harrisonville Road heading for New Santa Fe. Protecting the Confederate rear at Byram's Ford was Major General John S. Marmaduke's Division. It was up to Marmaduke to hold off the Federal cavalry from the Department of Missouri commanded by Major General Alfred Pleasonton. Shelby's adjutant, Major John N. Edwards later wrote about the start of Sunday, October 23.



James G. Blunt



Jo Shelby

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The position now stood thus: Shelby, four miles to the right of the main road traveled by General Price, held Curtis and his eight thousand soldiers in check with a single division; in the rear General Marmaduke fought the advance of Rosecrans' entire army ... As long as General Marmaduke could hold the road upon which General Shelby had to retire in order to gain Price's line of march, Shelby was comparatively safe; but should Marmaduke be forced beyond this road, then, indeed, the position in front of Westport became one almost of destruction.

### Tour Stop, "Federals Cross Brush Creek"

#### *Directions*

[Waypoint = 39.039332 -94.595026]

This tour stop is located on the walking path along the south side of Brush Creek a couple of blocks west of Wornall/Broadway.

Walk down the hill and cross over to the north side of Ward Parkway. Turn left (west) and cross over Wornall/Broadway near the Winston Churchill statue. Take a moment to look up Wornall to the south. Then continue walking west and follow the sidewalk down to Brush Creek. Walk another couple of blocks and stop.

#### *Description*

You are standing in the general area where Jennison's First Brigade crossed Brush Creek as they advanced south to attack the Confederates. Ford's Fourth Brigade was on Jennison's left. The valley through which Brush Creek flowed was a thick woodland extending from this point south to the north end of Loose Park. About a half mile or so to the east was a small creek flowing south to north and emptying into Brush Creek. Present day Brookside Boulevard approximately follows the course of this creek, which is no longer visible.



Charles R. Jennison

That Sunday dawned cold with ice edging the sides of Brush Creek. As is often the case today, the creek's valley was cloaked in fog as the dismounted Federal cavalry waded through the creek to the south side. As they walked up the steep incline, they were not able to see very far ahead and it was eerily quiet. But they all knew the enemy was somewhere south of them.

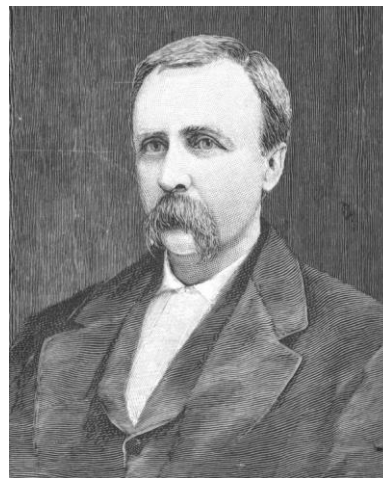
Meanwhile, Jo Shelby was getting his division organized and moving north towards Westport. Colonel Sydney D. Jackman's Brigade was on the Confederate left flank. On Jackman's right and making up the Confederate center was Shelby's Iron Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General M. Jeff Thompson. Fagan's Division (less Cabell's Brigade escorting the wagon train) formed on Shelby's right, east of Wornall and on past

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present day Troost Avenue.

The two brigades of Shelby's Division collided with the Federal Brigades under Jennison and Ford just south of Bent's Farm (present day Loose Park) early on Sunday morning. Major John N. Edwards, Shelby's Adjutant, later wrote about the start of the battle on Sunday morning.

The enemy, re-enforcing from Westport, came out to attack Shelby, and for two hours the hardest battle of the campaign raged with unabated and determined fury. Charge after charge was hurled upon his division, but were spent against the stone barriers held by the Missouriians, or hurled back like huge waves breaking into spray on the rocky face of cliffs.



John N. Edwards

### Tour Stop, "Thoman Meets with Curtis"

#### Directions

[Waypoint = 39.038660 -94.597267]

It's just a couple of blocks to the next stop. Follow the sidewalk west. When it brings you to Ward Parkway, continue west walking on the grass. Stop when you get to the intersection of Ward Parkway, Roanoke Parkway and Summit Street.

#### Description

It's between 10:00 and 11:00 a.m., and so far, things have not been going well for the Federals. More than once they have advanced up the hill and attacked the Confederates only to be driven back and across to the north of Brush Creek. Major General Samuel R. Curtis had come down to the front to confer with General Blunt. Curtis brought reinforcements with him and decided to lead the next attack. But then something happened and Curtis changed his mind. A middle aged farmer entered the Federals lines and demanded to speak with General Curtis.

About to turn 45 years old, George Thoman farmed 90 acres just south of the section line (present day 55<sup>th</sup> Street) along the Harrisonville Road (present day Prospect Avenue). Once the Federals had pulled back north of Brush Creek on October 22, Thoman found his farm easy pickings for Confederate foraging parties. Legend has it some soldiers came to his farm and helped themselves to, among many other items, a pregnant



George Thoman



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mare. Thoman told them the mare was close to foaling and therefore of no use to them, but they took the mare anyway. Thoman was certain they were Confederates.

As he skirted the fighting, searching to no avail for his mare, Thoman must have gotten some sense of how the battle was progressing. He knew something of value to the Federals. He went looking for somebody in charge. If he couldn't get his mare back, George Thoman would get even.

Thoman explained to General Curtis there was a little known road, more of a path really, following a ravine formed by Swan Creek. This ravine followed a north to south path and reached to present day 55<sup>th</sup> Street. Curtis believed Thoman's information and decided to take his escort along with the Ninth Wisconsin Battery and follow George Thoman. They headed west until they came to the ravine which ran to the south. Unseen by the Confederates fighting up on top of the plateau, Thoman led Curtis around to the left flank of Shelby's lines. There Curtis ordered the artillery to unlimber and open fire on the Confederates.

Always the politician, Curtis was melodramatic in his official report of this turn in events. Thoman must have looked older than his 45 years, because Curtis called him a "75 year old patriot."

I was directed by an old man, a Missouri patriot of seventy-five years, through a narrow defile to Brush Creek with Dodge's battery and other forces. With trembling, sinking steps the old man directed us to a position where we immediately began to demonstrate against the enemy that occupied the inclined plain and wooded heights on the south of Brush. The weary veteran refused to ride, but sunk down with delight and exhaustion when he saw the success of our guns. Like many other brave Missourians of that day he saw the rebellion vanishing before him and his home and country free.

### **Tour Stop, "Blair Moves to the Front"**

#### *Directions*

[Waypoint = 39.036244 -94.598024]

It's about 0.25 miles to the next tour stop. Cross to the south side of Ward Parkway and get headed up Summit Street. After about one block, turn right onto Sunset Drive. It's about another two blocks to go. When you reach the intersection of Sunset Drive and Rockwell Lane, you should notice a small, triangular island at this intersection. Walk over to the historical marker located in this island.

When you walk to the next tour stop, you will get a good idea of what the men in Blair's Third Brigade faced when they advanced against Shelby's men who were positioned up on the heights at the north end of Loose Park.

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### *Description*

The historical marker located here refers to the “Union Flanking Movement” that was discussed at the previous stop. But let’s consider other events of the day which happened near here.

Colonel Charles W. Blair was in command of the Third Brigade, which was comprised mostly of units from the Kansas State Militia. At the start of the day, Blair’s brigade had been moved down from Kansas City to Westport and deployed north of Brush Creek to support Jennison’s and Ford’s brigades. They had moved south of Brush Creek and then up the hill to support the first attack. But they hadn’t gotten very far when the orders came to fall back to the north side of Brush Creek.

Now it was mid-morning Blair’s Third Brigade was on the Federal right flank. There was a large gap between Blair and Moonlight’s Second Brigade, who had been ordered to move to the south along the state line. Blair was getting nervous about the safety of his position across the creek north of where you are standing. He was receiving reports of Confederate movements into that gap on the right. So on his own initiative, Blair ordered the Third Brigade to cross Brush Creek and move into the area in which you are standing. Shortly after Blair repositioned his forces, Curtis was beginning to execute his flanking movement. As Curtis moved around the Confederate left flank, the rest of the Army of the Border would advance up the hill and attack the enemy front. Blair’s decision was validated when he received orders to advance. Colonel Blair described the brigade’s movements in his official report.

A rumor reaching me that the enemy was attempting to flank our position on the right, and fearing to wait for orders lest it might be accomplished I dispatched a messenger to General Blunt to inform him of what I was doing, and hastily threw my line up into the dense timber on my right, twice its own length, and then pushed it steadily forward. At this time I received orders from Major-General Curtis to make the movement which I had already commenced. Thus reassured, I moved forward as rapidly as the thick undergrowth and broken ground would permit until I came to the edge of an open field ... a heavy fire was here opened on us from a corn-field which stretched from our right front, and which seemed filled with skirmishers, and from a large brick house in an orchard just beyond, in which a party of sharpshooters was stationed.

### **Tour Stop, “Confederate Advance Stalls”**

#### *Directions*

[Waypoint = 39.035069 -94.594518]

From the last tour stop, follow Rockwell Lane up the hill to the northwest corner of Loose Park. It’s about 0.25 miles up to Loose Park. It’s a pretty steep climb up to the park, and you won’t even have anyone shooting at you! Stop when you reach the historical



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marker on the north side of the intersection of 51<sup>st</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup> Streets.

### *Description*

Take a moment to read the text on the historical marker. Fifty-First Street marks the high water mark for the Confederate advance on October 23, 1864. Back then there was a long stone wall running east/west, broken just east of here where Wornall Lane passed.

It was cold and foggy at dawn when the First, Second and Fourth Brigades advanced through the woods walking out of the Brush Creek valley and passing this point into the open fields of Bent's Farm. They did not encounter the men from Shelby's Division until they had walked another half mile or so south of present day 55<sup>th</sup> Street. The Battle of Westport had begun.

After a couple of hours of incessant fighting, the battle hardened Confederates had steadily forced the Federals back to the edge of the woods at the north end of present day Loose Park. Major General James G. Blunt ordered his forces to retreat down the hill and cross back to the north side of Brush Creek. Blunt waited for reinforcements before making a second attack. General Blunt described the events in his official report.

Soon after sunrise the First, Second, and Fourth Brigades were deployed into line of battle on the south side of the timber skirting Brush Creek, where Shelby's division, of Price's army, was advancing upon my line. Skirmishers were thrown forward and the engagement with small-arms and artillery soon became general. My advance line being hard pressed ... [and] time being required to get the militia arriving from Kansas City dismounted and in position, and the contest in front being severe and unequal, I directed my advance line to fall back to the north side of Brush Creek. The enemy advanced a short distance, but did not attempt to attack my second line, with the exception of a small force that approached through the timber to attack my left flank. This force was promptly repulsed.

When dawn arrived on Sunday, Brigadier General Jo Shelby formed his division into lines about a mile south of present day Loose Park and advanced north to attack the Federals. Shelby described their success in his official report.

My division moved squarely against the enemy about 8 o'clock in the direction of Westport, and very soon became fiercely engaged, as usual. The enemy had regained all the strong positions taken from them the day before by General Thompson, and it became imperatively necessary to force that flank of the enemy back. Inch by inch and foot by foot they gave way before my steady onset. Regiment met regiment, and opposing batteries draped the scene in clouds of dense and sable smoke ... Again were the Federals driven within sight of Westport, and here I halted to reform my lines, naturally broken and irregular by the country passed over, intending to make a direct attack upon the town.

But a serious mistake had been made by the Confederates. After a couple of hours of intense fighting, their men began to run low on ammunition. To make matters worse, the

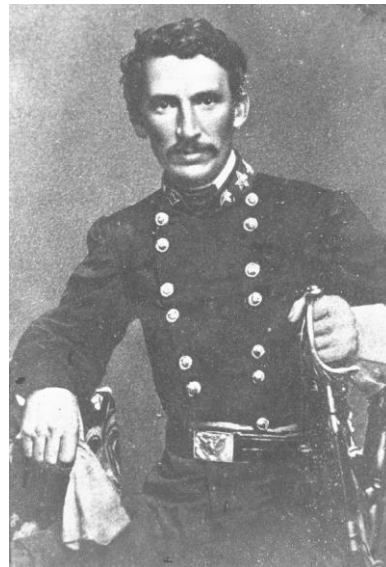
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ammunition train was moving south, away from Shelby's position at Bent's Farm. It took over an hour to bring ammunition forward, and by that time, other events occurred which doomed the Confederates. Brigadier General M. Jeff Thompson later recalled his frustration at how events unfolded.

On the morning of the 23rd of October, we ... moved towards Westport ... The regiments were brought into line ... Jackman's Brigade took the extreme left. Smith's, Johnson's, Gordon's and Slayback's commands were on the left center, and Irwin, Elliott and Williams on the right of the main road [Wornall Lane].

We moved to [our] positions under a hot artillery fire, and soon reached the small arms. While awaiting the others to gain their positions, we were peppered by the enemy, and several small demonstrations were made ... Now came our time. Smith was repulsed, and Slayback moved to take his place in the line and fearlessly charging among the enemy they broke, and the whole command advanced, and soon drove them from all their defenses into Westport.

The men were now thoroughly exasperated, and had we not had to wait for more ammunition, I believe that I could have taken Westport with that portion of the Brigade then with me. An hour or more was lost in obtaining ammunition.



M. Jeff Thompson

### Tour Stop, "Douglas's Battery"

#### *Directions*

[Waypoint = 39.035069 -94.594518]

The next stop is just across 51<sup>st</sup> Street. Your destination is the grassy area just to the west of that children's playground at the north end of the park.

#### *Description*

Deployed near this location during the late morning was one unit deserving special mention. It was one section from the Independent Battery, U. S. Colored Light Artillery, also known as Douglas's Battery. Douglas's Battery was the only Federal unit serving under the command of black officers. The section deployed near here contained two 10-pounder Parrott Guns manned by 30 colored men under the command of Second Lieutenant Patrick H. Minor. The section was attached to the Ninth Wisconsin Light Battery, Captain James H. Dodge commanding, in Colonel Blair's Third Brigade.

The Independent Battery, U. S. Colored Light Artillery, originated on June 29, 1864 when Major General Samuel R. Curtis requested permission from Secretary of War Edwin

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Stanton to raise a “colored battery.” The next day, Stanton authorized Curtis to raise the battery, and two days later Curtis sent a formal request to Kansas Governor Thomas Carney asking him to raise a colored battery. That same day, Curtis issued General Orders, No. 34.

Major R[obert] H. Hunt, Fifteenth Kansas Volunteer Cavalry, is announced as chief of artillery department, and the recruiting, organizing, and drilling a battery of persons of African descent will be under his supervision.

Two men were instrumental in recruiting volunteers to serve on the colored battery. William D. Matthews was born a free man in Maryland in 1827, moving to Leavenworth, Kansas in 1856. Patrick H. Minor was born in Louisiana in 1829, the son of a white planter, moving to Kansas in 1862. Both men served in the First Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment raised by Kansas Senator James H. Lane. Major Hunt put Matthews and Minor to work recruiting volunteers for the battery. The battery was only partially organized when Lieutenant Minor received orders in mid-October from Major Hunt to pull together one section to assist in resisting Price’s invasion force. Major Hunt wrote about some of the action performed by Lieutenant Minor during the Battle of Westport.

October 23, McLain's battery made some excellent shots, one of which struck one of the enemy's guns near the left trunnion, breaking it in two. Another gun was struck and broken across the chassis by a rifled piece manned by the colored battery, but which was sighted by Captain Dodge, commanding Ninth Wisconsin Volunteer Battery. Both captains used their artillery with skill.

### **Tour Stop, “McLain’s Battery”**

#### *Directions*

[Waypoint = 39.034483 -94.592088]

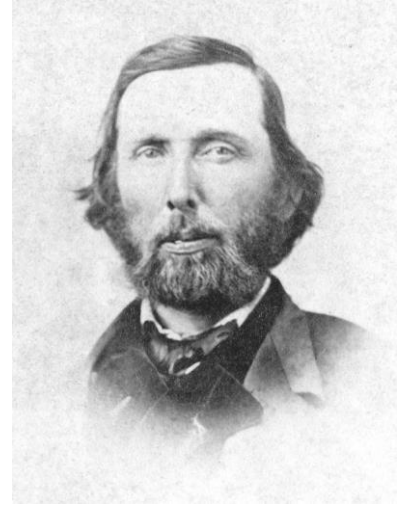
Walk east to the northeastern corner of the park. Yes, you are near your car, but you’re only halfway through the walking tour. Walk down Wornall Road to the grassy area just south of the entrance to the semi-circular parking area. Just to the west of where you are standing is a historical marker entitled “Union Artillery.”

#### *Description*

Take a moment to read the text on the historical marker. During the early morning’s fighting, Captain William D. McLain’s Independent Battery, Colorado Light Artillery was deployed astride Wornall Lane at this location. McLain’s Battery was assigned to the Fourth Brigade in Blunt’s Provisional Cavalry Division, Colonel James H. Ford commanding. Colonel Ford reported the battery having “five 3-inch rifled guns [probably 10-pounder Parrotts], and one mountain howitzer.” Captain Richard J. Hinton, Company B, Second Kansas Colored Infantry Regiment, later wrote about the battery’s deployment.

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McLain was in position at the edge of the timber, half a mile to the rear. At first the firing was entirely artillery, with the exception of a few shots exchanged by the skirmish line. The rebels continued deploying, receiving large reinforcements, and advancing with spirit and vigor. Their long lines pressed forward steadily, displaying as they did so in the center a fine battle flag. Two guns, under Lieutenant [George S.] Eayre, were ordered forward, taking position on the hill and overlooking the open prairie across which the enemy was advancing. The guns did excellent work, were double shotted with canister, while the range being short and the firing rapid, every shot told. The enemy's guns replied with vigor.



James H. Ford

Confederate General M. Jeff Thompson later wrote how effective the opening artillery fire from McLain's Battery was.

We were unmolested until we were near the town when the enemy's artillery opened upon us. One of the first shots knocked off the head of a man in Slayback's Battalion, as smooth as a guillotine could have cut it.

Colonel Ford described an attempt by the enemy to neutralize McLain's Battery.

I formed a portion of the Second Colorado and Sixteenth Kansas on the hill immediately south of Brush Creek, with one section of the battery, but soon after advanced to the edge of the prairie and took up position across the road to the left of Colonel [Charles R.] Jennison's brigade, the section of the battery being placed in the road. For a while the firing was exclusively artillery, but the rebels advancing, the whole line was soon engaged and kept up a very steady and galling fire for two hours or more. The enemy was repeatedly repulsed, and one very bold and dashing charge made by him down the road upon the battery was very handsomely repulsed by portions of the Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry and Second Colorado Cavalry, the countercharge being led in person by Lieutenant-Colonel [Samuel] Walker, commanding Sixteenth Kansas Cavalry, and in which charge he received a very severe wound in the foot.

It was shortly after this when General Blunt ordered his forces to withdraw down the hill to Brush Creek, McLain's Battery crossed to the north side of Brush Creek and deployed on high ground north of the creek. But the battery would move up Wornall Lane and onto Bent's Farm again when the Federals advanced later that morning.

### **Tour Stop, "Curtis Hits Shelby's Left Flank"**

#### *Directions*

[Waypoint = 39.028361 -94.602974]

## Self-Guided Tour to the Battle of Westport near Loose Park

It's about one mile to the next tour stop located at the intersection of Sunset Drive and 55<sup>th</sup> Street. Walk north to 51<sup>st</sup> Street and turn left (west). Head west along 51<sup>st</sup> Street and then down Rockwell Lane about 0.4 miles until you reach Sunset Drive. When you reach that triangular median at Sunset Drive, veer to the left to walk in a southwesterly direction down Sunset Drive. As you walk along Sunset Drive, you will be following the approximate route taken by General Curtis and the Ninth Wisconsin Battery as they followed George Thoman. Stay on Sunset drive the whole way (about 0.6 miles) until you reach 55<sup>th</sup> Street. When you get to 55<sup>th</sup> Street, stop in the park like median between Sunset Drive and Ward Parkway.

### *Description*

As you walk along Sunset Drive, use your imagination to make the homes on the left disappear. But there were thick woods shielding the Federal procession. Just like back at Brush Creek, there is a very steep hill to get up to Loose Park. Curtis and his escort were by no means silent as the artillery was hauled up the ravine, but they probably heard the fighting that was going on at Bent's Farm (present day Loose Park), even if they could not see it.

When you reach 55<sup>th</sup> Street, you are near the point where Curtis ordered the Ninth Wisconsin Battery to unlimber and open fire on the Confederate left flank.

Also in this area was Colonel Thomas Moonlight and the Second Brigade. First thing in the morning Moonlight had been further north on Brush Creek anchoring the right flank as the Federals advanced south up the hill. But after their advance had faltered, Blunt had second thoughts and ordered Moonlight to move the Second Brigade south over to the state line just east and south of here. Their job was to prevent the enemy from entering Kansas. As they listened to the fighting over at Bent's Farm, the Second Brigade's patience was wearing thin because they were "all eager for the fight."



Thomas Moonlight

So Colonel Moonlight decided to join in and moved the Second Brigade east from the state line arriving in this general location around the same time as did General Curtis with the Ninth Wisconsin Battery. In their reports, neither Curtis nor Moonlight mentioned meeting each other at this spot. But the Second Brigade attacked the enemy left flank as described by Colonel Thomas Moonlight in his official report.



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After falling back to Westport I received orders from General Blunt to pass around the right flank of the enemy and keep in between him and Kansas, which order was faithfully carried out, and while our forces from Westport were putting Price to rout the Second Brigade whipped in on the right flank in hot pursuit of that portion of the enemy invading Kansas.

Colonel Sydney D. Jackman's Brigade was on Shelby's left flank and turned his men to face this new threat from the left. But soon new events occurred elsewhere on the battlefield and Shelby was going to have to pull Jackman out of line while under fire. Events were starting to unravel for the Confederates.



Sydney D. Jackman

### Tour Stop, "Bent & Ward Houses"

#### Directions

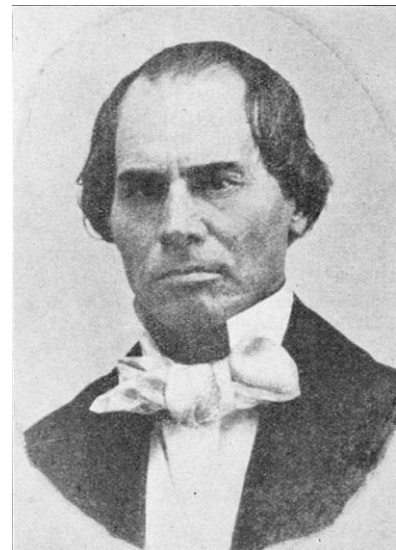
[Waypoint = 39.028172 -94.601717]

This tour stop is located at 1032 W 55<sup>th</sup> Street in Kansas City, Missouri. Start walking west along 55<sup>th</sup> Street by crossing over Sunset Drive. It's only about 100 yards from the intersection. You'll know you are there when you see the historical marker. This is private property so please stay on the sidewalk.

#### Description

Take a moment to read the text on the historical marker. Back in 1864, this area was a large farm owned by William Bent. Bent's land extended east to Wornall Lane. On the other side of the lane was the farm owned by John B. Wornall. Bent acquired the property in 1856.

Born in St. Louis in 1809, William Bent went west to Colorado with his brother, Charles, when he was 17 years old. Bent spent his years out west trapping, trading and hauling some freight along the Santa Fe Trail. Bent periodically returned to Missouri, which may have motivated his acquisition of the farm along Wornall Lane.



William Bent

There is conflicting evidence to determine whether the house you see from 55<sup>th</sup> Street existed in 1864. There is evidence that the northern section of the mansion is antebellum, probably constructed in the 1850s. After Bent's death in 1869, Seth E. Ward purchased Bent's Farm from the Bent estate. It was probably Ward who added that part of the house that you can see from 55<sup>th</sup> Street.



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But there was a large brick house located near here that was the center of fighting on October 23. Colonel Charles R. Jennison wrote about the brick house during the early morning advance by the Federals.

The 1st Brigade... marched, about 5 o'clock on the morning of the 23d, from Westport directly south, crossing Brush Creek and deploying soon after daylight its first skirmish line in a corn field south of Bent's house, on the right of the road, the howitzers being left with the other batteries in and adjacent to the road. The 2d Brigade was on the extreme right of the line as then formed. Our skirmish lines soon encountered the enemy swarming through the cornfields and in the timber southwest of Wornall's and the battle of Westport was speedily opened.

Shelby's men used the building as a base for sharpshooters. Federal Colonel Charles W. Blair wrote about a "large brick house" as his Third Brigade emerged from the woods and onto Bent's Farm.

A heavy fire was here opened on us from a corn-field which stretched from our right front, and which seemed filled with skirmishers, and from a large brick house in an orchard just beyond, in which a party of sharpshooters was stationed. In a few minutes several of our men had fallen, and the fire was incessant and close. I immediately ordered the right of the brigade forward and drove the enemy from the corn-field and house, while the left of the line kept straight forward through a stubble-field on their flank.

### Tour Stop, "Collins' Missouri Battery"

#### *Directions*

[Waypoint = 39.026477 -94.594728]

It's about four blocks to the next tour stop, which is located at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 56<sup>th</sup> Street. Cross 55<sup>th</sup> Street and walk east along the south side of the street. When you reach Summit Street, turn right (south). Walk south for one block and turn left (east) at 56<sup>th</sup> Street. Walk east for one block until you reach Pennsylvania Avenue. You should see a historical marker at the southeast corner of the intersection.

#### *Description*

Take a moment to read the historical marker located here. Captain Richard A. Collins was in command of two sections (four Parrott Guns) from his battery located near here on October 23. Collins moved his artillery forward Sunday morning when Shelby's Iron Brigade advanced north.

Brigadier General M. Jeff Thompson described the early morning movement north in his official report.

On the morning of the 23d we were ordered to march toward Westport, and we soon found ourselves confronted by the enemy, who had a battery commanding the road and covering the approaches to the town. Collins' battery was placed in position and

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Elliott's regiment and Williams' command were left to cover the guns and right of the road. I went with Gordon's, Smith's, Slayback's, and Johnson's commands to the left of the road and advanced upon the enemy.

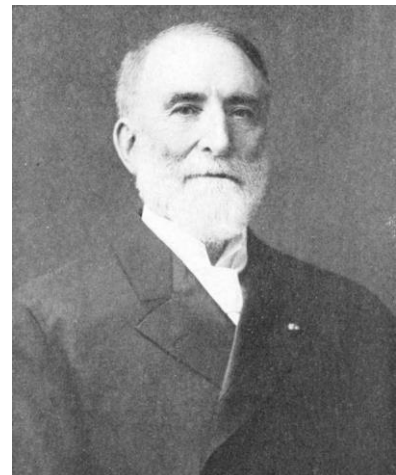
It was late morning when Shelby's position was flanked to the west by the Union commander Major General Curtis. Collins immediately wheeled his guns to the west and did battle with the artillery from the Ninth Wisconsin Battery that Curtis had brought with him on his flanking maneuver. Thompson reported that one of the Parrot Guns in Collins' batteries burst during this artillery duel.

Shelby decided the best he could do was to divide his division. He ordered Jackman to pull out of the line withdraw south to shore up the right. He was going to rely on his Iron Brigade to handle things here. Shelby described the situation in his official report.

The 23d of October dawned upon us clear, cold, and full of promise. My division moved squarely against the enemy about 8 o'clock in the direction of Westport, and very soon became fiercely engaged ... While the engagement was at its height Collins burst one of his Parrotts, but fought on with his three guns as if nothing had happened.

Collins finished the day with only one of his four guns still in operation. Major Robert H. Hunt, chief of the Federal artillery under Curtis, reported that the Federal artillery was able to disable two of the guns in Curtis's Battery.

October 23, McLain's battery made some excellent shots, one of which struck one of the enemy's guns near the left trunnion, breaking it in two. Another gun was struck and broken across the chassis by a rifled piece manned by the colored battery, but which was sighted by Captain Dodge, commanding Ninth Wisconsin Volunteer Battery. Both captains used their artillery with skill. The rebels left the wrecks of these guns on the field and retreated.



Robert H. Hunt

In his report, Confederate Colonel Sydney Jackman confirmed that Collins was down to only one gun. When Shelby ordered Colonel Sydney Jackman to move his brigade to support Fagan to the east, Captain Collins limbered up and went with Jackman.

Captain Collins, of the battery of General Thompson's brigade, came to my assistance with his only remaining gun and fought gallantly until the command fell back.

### Tour Stop, "10-pounder Parrott Gun"

#### *Directions*

[Waypoint = 39.028366 -94.594517]

It's just a block north to the next tour stop, which is located at the south end of Loose

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Park. Walk north up Pennsylvania Avenue and cross 55<sup>th</sup> Street into Loose Park. Head for the replica 10-pounder Parrott Gun located just to the north of you.

### *Description*

Take a few moments to review the map marker and the interpretive signs located here. The map shows the location of the opposing forces at 11:00 a.m. on October 23.

The artillery piece is a replica of a 10-pounder Parrott Gun. This rifled gun used a 10 pound shell that was three inches in diameter. The gun had a range of more than 1,800 yards when elevated at 5 degrees. Both sides had 10-pounder Parrotts in use during the battle.

By late morning, Shelby's lines had pulled back to this location. Instead of running east-west, the Confederate line ran at a shallow angle from southwest to northeast because of the threat to their left flank. When Curtis and Moonlight had attacked the Confederate left flank, Jackman had refused his line to face this new threat. Brigadier General M. Jeff Thompson, in command of Shelby's Iron Brigade, was being pressed by Blunt's advance up the hill and onto Bent's Farm. The Federal artillery was throwing shells and canister into the Confederate ranks.

Shelby appeared to be holding this position when events turned against him. The Federal assault by Major General Alfred Pleasonton four miles to the east at Byram's Ford had succeeded in breaking Marmaduke's defense line. The Confederate right was collapsing and Major General Sterling Price sent word to Shelby telling him to withdraw south to protect the wagon train. Shelby's Adjutant, Major John N. Edwards, recalled Shelby's words.

Tell General Price I cannot fall back now ... he must send me reinforcements. Every man shall die at this wall before I leave my wounded or give up a single piece of artillery ... I will save this army yet.

Shelby decided the best he could do was to divide his division. He ordered Jackman to pull out of the line withdraw south to shore up the right. He was going to rely on his Iron Brigade to handle things here. Shelby described the situation in his official report.

About 12 o'clock I sent Jackman's brigade back to the road taken by the train, for it was reported that General Marmaduke had fallen back before the enemy ... and thus my whole right flank and rear were exposed. Jackman had scarcely reached the point indicated when he met an order from General Fagan to hasten to his help at a gallop, for the entire prairie in his front was dark with Federals.

Faced with fighting four Federal brigades, the Iron Brigade was unable to hold on for much longer. Shelby ordered what remained of his division to withdraw south.

### **Tour Stop, "McGehee's Charge"**

## Self-Guided Tour to the Battle of Westport near Loose Park

### Directions

[Waypoint = 39.029857 -94.592471]

Just south of the gun replica is the Loose Park walking/running trail circling the park. Follow this path to the east and continue walking when the trail turns north. After about 0.2 miles, you will see a historical marker in between the walking path and the sidewalk. That's your tour stop.

### Description

Take a moment to read the text on the historical marker. You are standing in the area where McLain's Battery was attacked by Colonel J. H. McGehee's Arkansas Cavalry Regiment. It was nearing 11:00 a.m. when the Federals advanced up the hill from Brush Creek. Once again, McLain's Battery deployed astride Wornall Lane, but this time further south near present day 53<sup>rd</sup> Terrace. Shelby's position was becoming more and more tenuous. He was receiving artillery fire from the north and west. The artillery fire from McLain's Battery was taking its toll on Shelby's men. And he had just received a courier from Price ordering him to pull out and withdraw south. Shelby makes no mention of McGehee's charge in his official report. But then McGehee's regiment was assigned to Dobbin's Brigade in Fagan's Division. Still, General Thompson remembered getting orders to support the charge.

My orders were to hold steady until a column of Arkansans charged in column down the road on the federal battery, and then move to support them. It was only a few minutes when we heard the rush, and soon the Regiment of Col. McG[eh]ee of Dobbins Brigade entered the lane at full speed and dashed for the guns some four hundred yards away.

Regardless, Colonel McGehee led a charge down Wornall Lane towards the battery. The stone walls lining either side of the road severely limited his cavalry's maneuverability. Upon reaching the battery, McGehee discovered it was not the lightly defended battery he was expecting.

Federal Colonel Charles R. Jennison, commanding the First Brigade, saw the charge and yelled to Captain Curtis Johnson, Company E, 15<sup>th</sup> Kansas Cavalry, to support the exposed battery. Johnson and Company E arrived just as McGehee's troops began to attack. Legend has it Captain Johnson and Colonel McGehee met each other with pistols drawn. Both Johnson and McGehee were wounded and the Confederates repulsed. McLain's Battery was safe. In his official report, Colonel Jennison wrote that Colonel McGehee was killed, but in fact the Confederate was only wounded.

The First Brigade, with a detachment of the Second Colorado and McLain's (Colorado) battery, took position on the right of the road, commencing an impetuous attack upon the rebels, who were rallying for a charge upon the battery, one section of which was posted directly in the road. Hardly had we taken position when the enemy charged

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in column upon the guns up the road ... Seeing that a desperate effort was required to save the battery I immediately rallied Company E and led in person a charge upon the flank of the rebel column, a movement which was entirely successful, though a desperate hand-to-hand contest ensued, after maintaining which for a short time the enemy withdrew in disorder toward his main lines southward. In this action especial praise is due to officers and men engaged, and more particularly to Capt. Curtis Johnson, commanding Company E, Fifteenth, which was alone in the charge. During the actions Captain Greene, commanding the squadrons of the Second Colorado, brought his troops to our assistance, by which we succeeded in killing and wounding a large number of the rebels, and taking nearly 100 prisoners. In the charge Company E sustained a loss of 13 men wounded. To Captain Johnson I would express the highest sense of his excellence and soldierly ability in one of the most trying situations of that day. In this action Captain Johnson personally encountered Colonel McGhee, of an Arkansas regiment, both firing with revolvers, the result of which was that Colonel McGhee was killed, the captain receiving a ball in the arm, which inflicted a very severe and painful wound, from which he has not yet recovered. The enemy having fallen back upon the road, our lines were reformed and again advanced through the fields on the right of the road, driving the rebels at all points.

The tour is over. It's now time to return to your car. The semi-circular parking lot is about three blocks north of your current position. We certainly hope you enjoyed this tour!

### Epilogue

It was just after noon when Shelby pulled his men from Bent's Farm and began to withdraw south. But the day's fighting was far from over. Shelby had already sent Jackman's Brigade southward. Now he led the Iron Brigade and what was left of Collins Battery to the southeast. But the enemy, Pleasonton's cavalry from Byram's Ford, was in his rear. Shelby wrote about their desperate withdrawal from Bent's Farm in his official report.

Now my entire rear was in possession of the enemy, and the news was brought when Thompson was fighting for dear life at Westport. Withdrawing him as soon as possible, and with much difficulty, for he was hard pressed, I fell back as rapidly as I could after the retiring army, the force I had been fighting at Westport coming up just behind, when, reaching the road, the prairie in my rear was covered almost by a long line of troops, which at first I supposed to be our own men. This illusion was soon dispelled, and the two great waves uniting, came down upon one little brigade and Colonel Slayback's regiment. The prospect was dark and desperate. Not a tree or bush was to be seen for weary miles and miles, and no helping army could be seen anywhere. I knew the only salvation was to charge the nearest line, break it if possible, and then retreat rapidly, fighting the other. The order was given. Thompson and Slayback fell upon them with great fury, mixed in *mêlée*, and unclasped from the deadly embrace weak and staggering. In attempting to reform my lines (which after

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breaking through and through the Federals were much scattered) an enfilading battery of six guns swept the whole line, and another in front opened with terrific effect. At the same time the column which followed me from Westport came down at the charge, and nothing was left but to run for it, which was now commenced. The Federals seeing the confusion pressed on furiously, yelling, shouting, and shooting, and my own men fighting, every one on his own hook, would turn and fire and then gallop away again. Up from the green sward of the waving grass two miles off a string of stone fences grew up and groped along the plain--a shelter and protection. The men reached it.

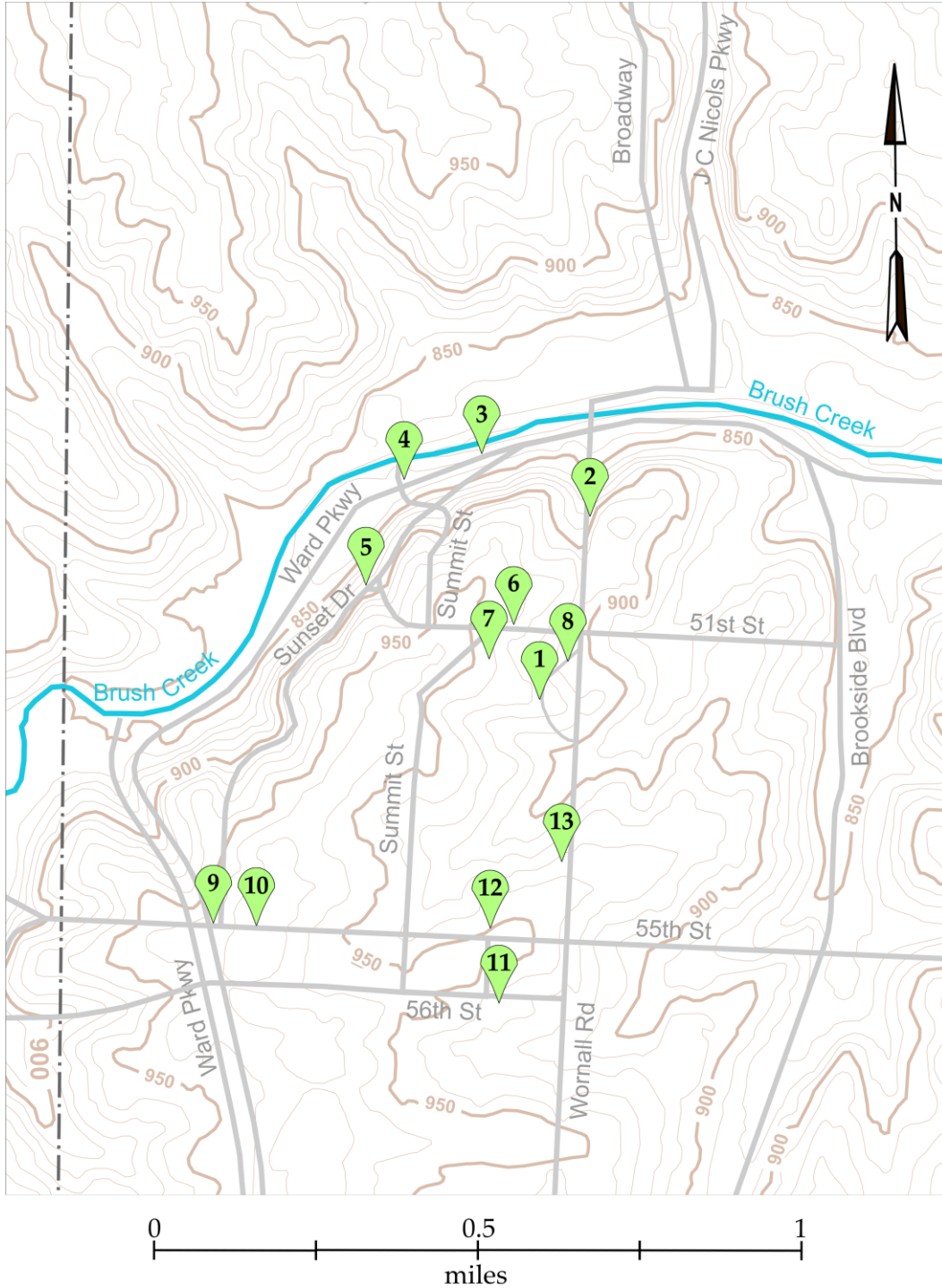
That stone wall was two miles from Bent's Farm, running through present day Forest Hills Cemetery. This is where Shelby and only part of his division set up to make what today is referred to as "Shelby's Last Stand." With effectively only one brigade, Shelby was able to hold off the combined forces of both General Blunt's and General Pleasonton's cavalry. After being repulsed by Shelby, the Federals pulled back to regroup, and Shelby was able to escape south. The fighting on October 23 was over, and the Confederates stopped to catch their breath south of New Santa Fe.

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Last updated: March 26, 2016



## Self-Guided Tour to the Battle of Westport near Loose Park



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|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Loose Park                 | 8. McLain's Battery                |
| 2. Federals Advance up Hill   | 9. Curtis Hits Shelby's Left Flank |
| 3. Federals Cross Brush Creek | 10. Bent & Ward Houses             |
| 4. Thoman Meets with Curtis   | 11. Collins' Missouri Battery      |
| 5. Blair Moves to the Front   | 12. 10-pounder Parrott Gun         |
| 6. Confederate Advance Stalls | 13. McGehee's Charge               |
| 7. Douglas's Battery          |                                    |

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