



Augusta's Civil War Legacy in Bronze

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Semple's Alabama Battery 12-pounder Napoleon gun on a metal replica mount in the Arsenal quadrangle at Augusta University Summerville Campus, Augusta, Georgia | courtesy of the author

Augusta, Georgia, proudly claims that four Civil War-era 12-pounder Napoleon guns, displayed in the community for more than 150 years, are the relics of a Confederate unit called Semple's Alabama Battery.

The battery was organized at Montgomery, Alabama, in March 1862. Henry Churchill Semple, a Montgomery lawyer, was the first captain. In 1864 Capt. Richard Goldthwaite succeeded him as battery commander. The battery was equipped with six (later reduced to four) bronze 12-pounder Napoleon guns, manufactured in New Orleans in early 1862 by Leeds & Company. The unit first participated in Bragg's Kentucky Campaign in 1862. Following that, they fought at Murfreesboro, Tennessee; Chickamauga and Chattanooga, including Ringgold Gap; the Atlanta Campaign, including engagements at Resaca, Gilgal Church, Kennesaw Mountain, Atlanta, and Jonesboro; and Hood's Tennessee Campaign, including the battles of Franklin and Nashville. During most of this time the battery operated in support of Maj. Gen. Patrick Cleburne's Division. Transferred to the East in March 1865, the battery ended its service at Augusta in April 1865, and its four 12-pounder guns were taken to the United States Arsenal at Augusta for storage.



Undated portrait of Henry Churchill Semple in the uniform of a Confederate army major, from the Henry C. Semple Papers | Alabama Dept. of Archives and History

The arsenal was an important facility for the manufacture, maintenance, and storage of arms for many years beginning in 1820. During the Civil War it was operated by the Confederate government; in 1865 it returned to U.S. control. The arsenal closed in 1955 and the land was turned over to the Georgia Board of Regents. After passing through a number of iterations, the property became the home of the Summerville Campus of Augusta University. Through it all, the central quadrangle of the old arsenal has been preserved and remains intact.

When the U.S. Army gave up the arsenal in 1955, some of its prized military artifacts were given to the city of Augusta. Subsequently, they were transferred to the Army at nearby Fort Gordon (then Camp Gordon). These included the four tubes of Civil War-era 12-pounder Napoleon guns, formerly the armament of Semple's Alabama Battery that had been stored at the arsenal after Confederate surrender in 1865. Later, two of the tubes that had been given to Fort Gordon were returned to the university and were displayed on campus, originally on pedestal mounts.



Trunnion of a Napoleon 12-pounder gun of Semple's Alabama Battery, showing the Leeds & Co. marking, at Alexander Hall, Fort Gordon, Georgia | courtesy of the author

Available records at Fort Gordon show the two Napoleons that were retained there were prominently displayed on pedestals in front of the post headquarters building, at least from 1967 and probably earlier. When the old post headquarters was demolished in 1997, the guns were moved to the Signal School headquarters and mounted in front of Alexander Hall, where they stand today. All four tubes still bear the marking of "Leeds & Co., New Orleans" and their rim base (manufacturing) numbers. The two tubes at Fort Gordon are Nos. 46 and 54, the two at the university are Nos. 45 and 53

In 2002 one of the university tubes was refurbished and mounted on a replica wooden carriage for display in the old arsenal quadrangle. The carriage quickly deteriorated when exposed to the elements and was replaced with a metal carriage funded by a donation from the Atlanta History Center. The second gun was remounted in 2011 and is now displayed on its metal carriage at the campus Arsenal Gatehouse Museum. The renovations were funded by grants from the Georgia Department of Transportation, private donations, and the city of Augusta. Although the university was unable to provide a cost for the replica carriages, Richard Williamson of Avondale, Georgia, Confederate artillery expert, estimates the cost of a wooden No. 2 carriage at \$12,000 to \$14,000 and a metal carriage at \$20,000. Williamson also estimates the value of the Napoleon tubes at \$250,000 to \$300,000 each, given their provenance and battle history.



Semple's Alabama Battery flag captured by Union forces at Ringgold Gap, Georgia, on Nov. 27, 1863 | Museum of the Confederacy

This article is a revised version of an appendix in the author's monograph, *Semple's Alabama Battery: Augusta's Civil War Legacy in Bronze* (2014).



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