

You can learn more about the life of Alexander W. Doniphan through these works:

Allen, D. C. *A Sketch of the Life and Character of Col. Alexander W. Doniphan*. Liberty, MO. 1897. Print\*.

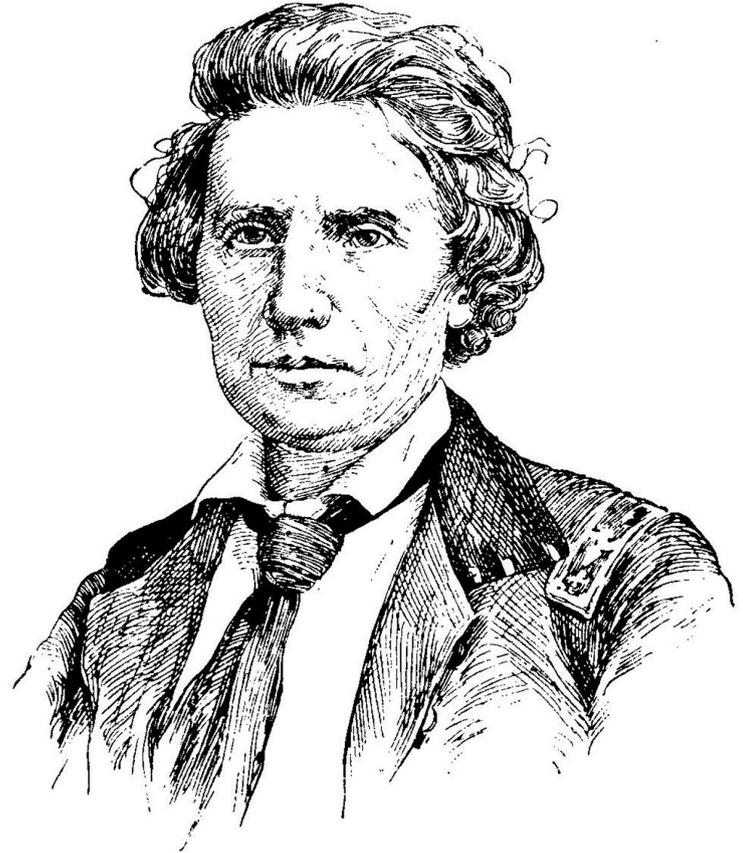
Britton, Rollin J. "Gen. Alexander W. Doniphan." 8th Annual Banquet of the Gallatin Commercial Club. Gallatin Commercial Club, Gallatin, Missouri. 20 Feb. 1914. Speech\*.

Dawson, Joseph G. *Doniphan's Epic March: The 1st Missouri Volunteers in the Mexican War*. Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1999. Print.

Doniphan, Alexander W. "People of Clay County." The 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of Clay County, Missouri. Liberty. 5 June 1872. Speech\*.

Launius, Roger D. *Alexander William Doniphan: Portrait of a Missouri Moderate*. Columbia: University of Missouri, 1997. Print.

\*These files are available for downloading at [www.WindingRiver.com/Doniphan](http://www.WindingRiver.com/Doniphan)



A. W. Doniphan

Alexander William Doniphan was born near Maysville in Mason County, Kentucky, on July 9, 1808, and died in Richmond, Ray County, Missouri, on August 8, 1887. He was 79 years of age at his death.

Descending from Revolutionary War ancestry, Doniphan graduated from Augusta College in Kentucky in 1827 at age 19. In 1829, after studying law for two years, he was admitted to practice in the courts of Ohio and Kentucky. In 1830 he relocated to Lafayette County, Missouri, where he established a law office. Within a few years, he traveled to Liberty, Clay County, where he became known as a fearless orator in the courts of law.

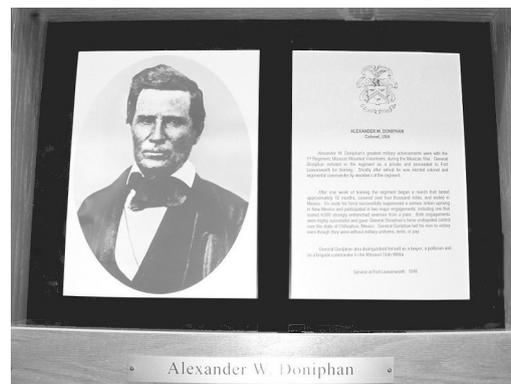
In 1833, Doniphan, along with three other attorneys, represented the claims of Mormon Church members in property disputes with non-Mormons in Jackson County, Missouri. As the conditions between the early Mormon settlers and non-Mormons in Jackson County worsened, Doniphan and the other attorneys played a larger role in representing their Church clients in private mediation, the courts and in petitions for protection to the Governor of Missouri.

In 1837 he married Elizabeth Jane Thornton, a daughter of Colonel John Thornton, one of Clay County's first settlers. That marriage produced two sons, both of whom died in their youth by separate accidents. During Doniphan's 30 years in Clay County he was regarded as a leading citizen, giving the best of his abilities to the county's social and economic development.

Although a member of the Disciples of Christ Church, he was one of the founders of William Jewell College, a Baptist affiliated school in Liberty, Missouri. Doniphan was a strong supporter of many educational endeavors and his name appears as a trustee of a number of early schools. In 1853, he became the first Clay County School Commissioner.

While serving in the 1836-1837 General Assembly, Doniphan was instrumental in organizing Caldwell and Daviess counties as a home for the Mormons. Less than two years later, his defense of the Mormon settlers in those two counties would lead to heroic actions that saved the lives of the leaders of that Church.

In the fall of 1838, Doniphan, a practicing attorney in Liberty, Missouri, was called to lead a detachment of approximately two hundred Clay County militia, to Caldwell and Daviess counties to assist in settling a dispute between the Mormons and non-Mormons in the area. In what would become known as the Mormon War, then Brigadier General Doniphan was ordered by General Lucas of the State Militia to execute Joseph Smith, Jr., founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, his older brother Hyrum and other Church leaders. He flatly refused the direct order stating that, "It is cold-blooded murder."



**Alexander W. Doniphan, Brigadier General, USA  
Fort Leavenworth Hall of Fame**

Though his disobedience could have led to his own court martial, that refusal saved the lives of those Mormon leaders. The Church leaders were turned over to civilian authorities, and although Joseph and Hyrum Smith and others were imprisoned over the winter in harsh conditions in the Liberty jail, the charges against them were not proven and the prisoners were eventually allowed to escape and rejoin their families.

Doniphan led one of the most famous military expeditions in American history to Old Mexico in 1846-1847. He organized a mounted regiment of Missouri volunteers that formed part of Stephen W. Kearny's force in his march on Santa Fe. Doniphan's service during the Mexican-American war was highlighted not only by military victory, but also his administration and the writing of new constitutions for conquered lands. His service during this war is recognized by his inclusion in the Fort Leavenworth Hall of Fame.

Following his service in the war, Doniphan returned to his law practice in Liberty where he grew in reputation as a supporter of business, political and economic growth of the local community and the nation. He was appointed by President Abraham Lincoln to serve as a delegate to the Washington Peace Conference in 1861. In 1862 he moved to St. Louis, where he worked as a lawyer with the Missouri Claims Commission seeking pensions for refugees during the Civil War.

Following the Civil War he relocated to Richmond, Ray County, Missouri, where he practiced law until his death. He is buried in Liberty, Missouri, beside his wife and two sons.

Alexander W. Doniphan's outstanding characteristics and personal commitments in education, jurisprudence, statesmanship, patriotism and business remain a hallmark of exemplary citizenship. His service to community and nation were feted in his own life and continue to be celebrated today by the awarding of the Alexander W. Doniphan Community Service Award.