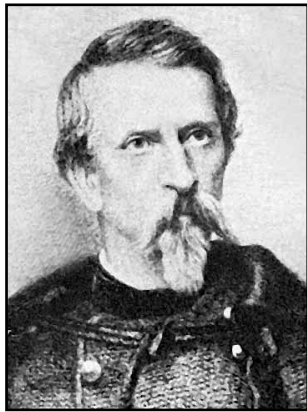


WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown heroes who have made a difference.

General Philip Kearny



Though he resided in Terre Haute but briefly, the memory of Gen. Philip Kearny Jr., known by historians as “Kearny the Magnificent,” endured locally for several decades.

The son of Philip and Susan (Watts) Kearny, he was born June 2, 1815, in New York City. His father was a co-founder of the New York Stock Exchange and his uncle, Maj. Gen. Stephen Watts Kearny, a hero of the War of 1812, was his role model. Philip attended Columbia College, earning a law degree with honors in 1833. When his maternal grandfather John Watts died three years later, he inherited more than a million dollars. Defying his widowed father’s expectations, Philip secured a commission with the First U.S.

Dragoons, the only mounted cavalry in the Army. Invited to attend a royal cavalry school in France, he became the aide-de-camp in the First Chasseurs d’Afrique, the finest regiment in the French Army, receiving his baptism of fire in the Algerian War of 1840.

On June 24, 1841, Kearny wed Diana Bullitt of Louisville in the “most opulent wedding ever held in the nation’s capital.” “Di,” as she was known, was the granddaughter of Ann Clark, a sister of Gen. George Rogers Clark and William Clark of Lewis and Clark fame. Diana’s father was Thomas Bullitt, one of the five initial proprietors of the Terre Haute Company, which platted the village in 1816. Bullitt died intestate on Dec. 10, 1823, owning 87.54 acres in Vigo County, circumscribed by present Second and Seventh streets, Washington Ave. and Hulman St. In November 1843, Vigo County court-appointed commissioners awarded Diana and Philip 18.62 acres between Sixth and Seventh streets in an apportionment involving Bullitt’s descendants.

Reluctantly succumbing to his wife’s request, Kearny retired from the military effective April 4, 1846. However, with the outbreak of the Mexican War on April 13, he withdrew his resignation and was assigned to recruit 120 men for Company F of the First U.S. Dragoons. Capt. Kearny arrived in Terre Haute in early June, establishing barracks at the southeast corner of Fourth and Wabash. Sparing no expense, he personally acquired 120 dappled gray horses and the finest saddles, drilling recruits in the commons on the northwest corner of Seventh and Wabash. Kearny and his cavalry were the talk of the town. By August 1846, Company F was equipped and trained to face the enemy. While attempting to capture Gen. Santa Anna at Churubusco, Mexico, during August 1847, Kearny’s left arm was shattered and had to be amputated at the shoulder. Gen. Winfield Scott, one of his commanders, called Major Kearny “the bravest and most perfect soldier I have ever known.” Despite his disability, Philip stayed in the Army but his marriage disintegrated. The Kearnys separated Aug. 24, 1849, but did not divorce until early 1858. Nevertheless, in 1853, Philip relinquished his interest in the Vigo County land to his wife. Meanwhile, he was the first American to win the French Legion of Honor. Brevetted brigadier general, Kearny offered his services at the outset of the Civil War. During an engagement at Chantilly, Va., on Sept. 1, 1862, he inadvertently rode into the Confederate line and was killed by a rifle ball.

Diana Kearny never remarried but, on Oct. 14, 1869, conveyed her land on Strawberry Hill in present Farrington’s Grove to John F. Gulick to subdivide.



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