DIVIDED LOYALTIES
CIVIL WAR DOCUMENTS FROM THE
MISSOURI STATE ARCHIVES

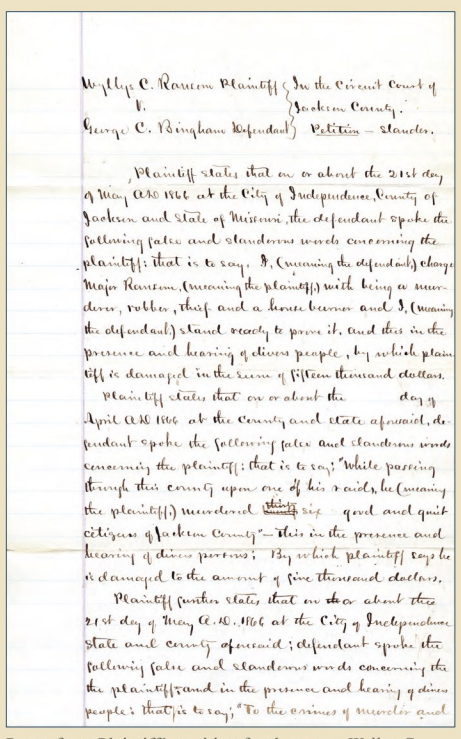
BATTLES FOUGHT IN COURT

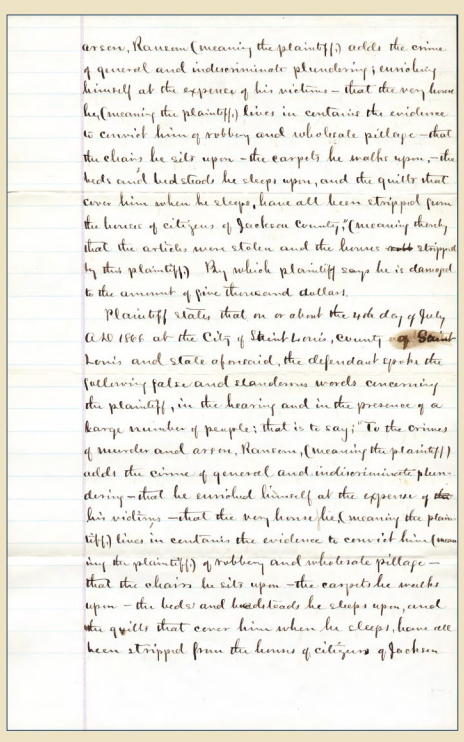
ONE UNION MAN FIGHTS ANOTHER

Besides achieving notoriety as Missouri's most famous artist, George Caleb Bingham was well known for his ability to make political and personal enemies. One of Bingham's most public feuds was with Brigadier General Thomas Ewing. Though both men supported the Union, Bingham sharply disagreed with the harsh tactics Ewing used to control the guerilla warfare that plagued the Kansas-Missouri border. On August 25, 1863, Ewing issued his famous "Order No. 11," which gave all residents of Jackson, Bates, and Cass Counties two weeks to vacate the area. The order applied to all citizens, whether they were believed to be loyal or disloyal to the Union. The order so enraged Bingham that he made it the topic of one of his most famous paintings, Order No. 11.

In 1866, Bingham was sued for slander by another Union-supporting enemy from the Civil War, Wyllys C. Ransom. As a Major in the Sixth Kansas Infantry, Ransom had reportedly allowed his men to steal and destroy the property of Missouri citizens. Bingham's public comments against Ransom finally led the former major to sue the artist for $30,000 in damages. While Bingham admitted that he had accused his adversary of crimes against citizens on more than one occasion, he denied that he had used the exact words attributed to him in court documents. The case appears to have been eventually dismissed.

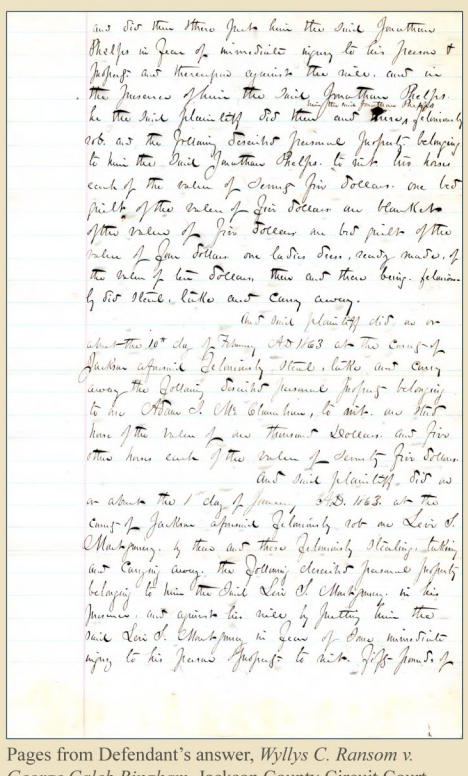
George Caleb Bingham, c. 1878
State Historical Society of Missouri - Columbia

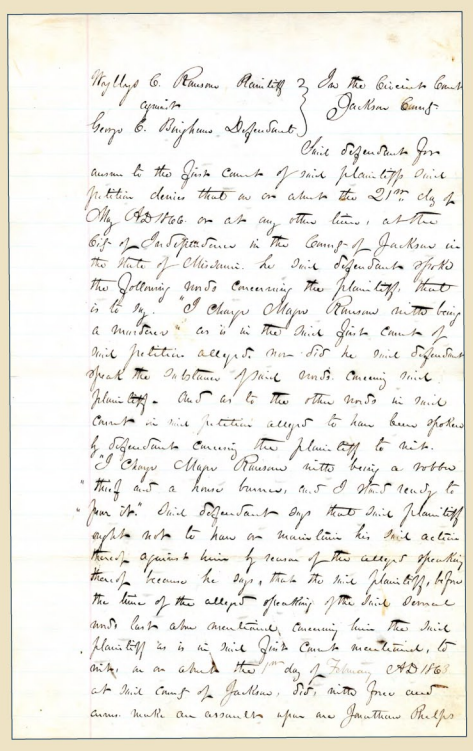




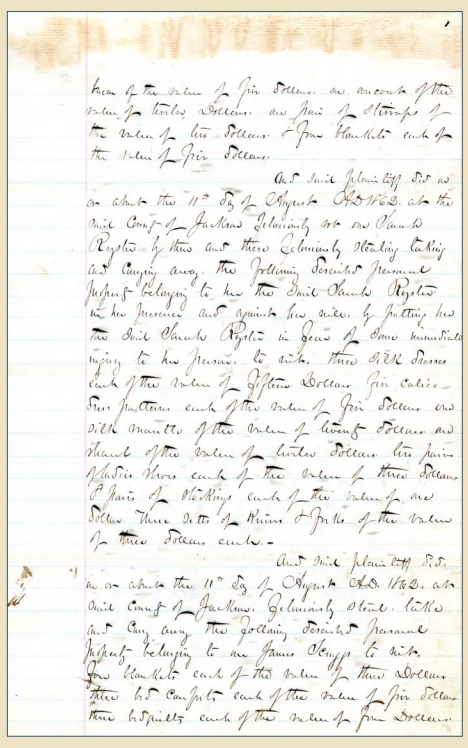
Pages from Plaintiff's petition for damages, *Wyllys C. Ransom v. George Caleb Bingham*, Jackson County Circuit Court, September 1866.
Missouri State Archives

The plaintiff claims that Bingham said of him, "To the crimes of murder and arson, Ransom adds the crime of general and indiscriminate plundering; enriching himself at the expense of his victims - that the very house he lives in contains the evidence to convict him of robbery and wholesale pillage - that the chairs he sits upon - the carpets he walks upon - the beds and bedsteads he sleeps upon, and the quilts that cover him when he sleeps, have all been stripped from the houses of the citizens of Jackson County."





Pages from Defendant's answer, *Wyllys C. Ransom v. George Caleb Bingham*, Jackson County Circuit Court, September 1866.
Missouri State Archives



"While I do not charge that these robberies and murders were really perpetuated by Ransom in person I hold that he is justly responsible therefore - They were the infernal work of his instruments selected by him for their well known fitness for such deeds. They were the work of men with whom he was voluntarily associated as chief."

George Caleb Bingham

Order No. 11
by George Caleb Bingham, 1868, State Historical Society of Missouri - Columbia

1866