

## W. Otto Gronen



W. Otto Gronen (left), Chief Draftsman, in his office at Rock Island Arsenal. This photograph appears in *Rock Island Arsenal in Peace and War*, published in 1898.

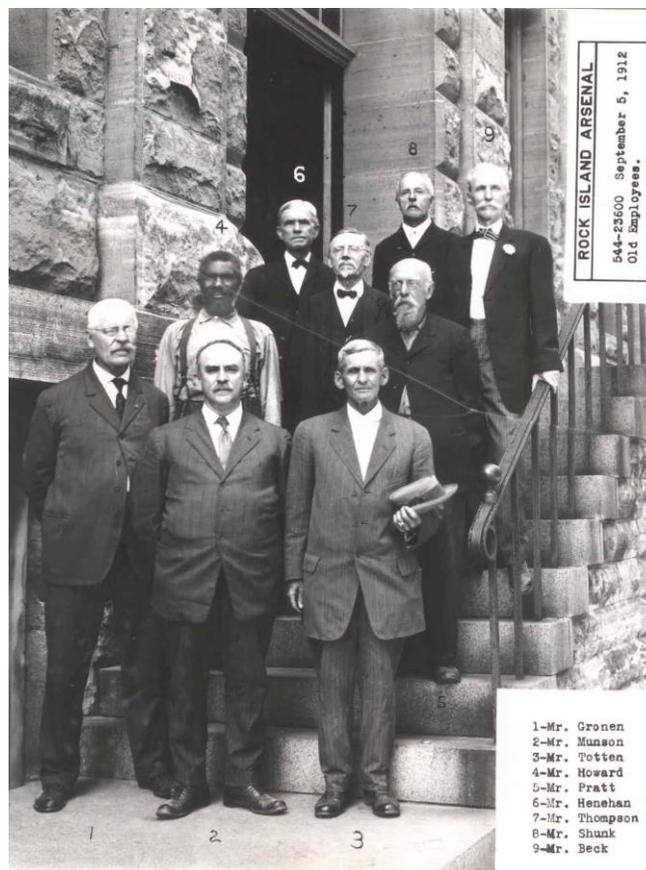
W. Otto Gronen was born in Cologne, Prussia (present day Germany), on August 15, 1838. He had a formal college education in Berlin and Paris. In 1858, at the age of 20 years, he immigrated to the United States. He enlisted with the Forty-Fifth New York Infantry on August 29, 1861, and served as a civil engineer during the Civil War. Due to a disability, he was discharged as a Lieutenant on June 6, 1868. He subsequently served as a topographical engineer on General Philip Sheridan's staff in Chicago, Illinois.

While living in Chicago, Gronen submitted a letter of application for employment as a draftsman at Rock Island Arsenal on June 25, 1870. He initially served with Brevet Brigadier General Thomas J. Rodman, second Commanding Officer of Rock Island Arsenal. Gronen was Rodman's chief draftsman beginning in 1870 and continued in this capacity as Major D.W. Flagler completed construction of the original arsenal buildings. Gronen worked at Rock Island Arsenal until August 7, 1915. In addition to assisting with the design of Rodman's plan for the construction of Rock Island Arsenal, Gronen also drew many of the original maps and building drawings. He completed a

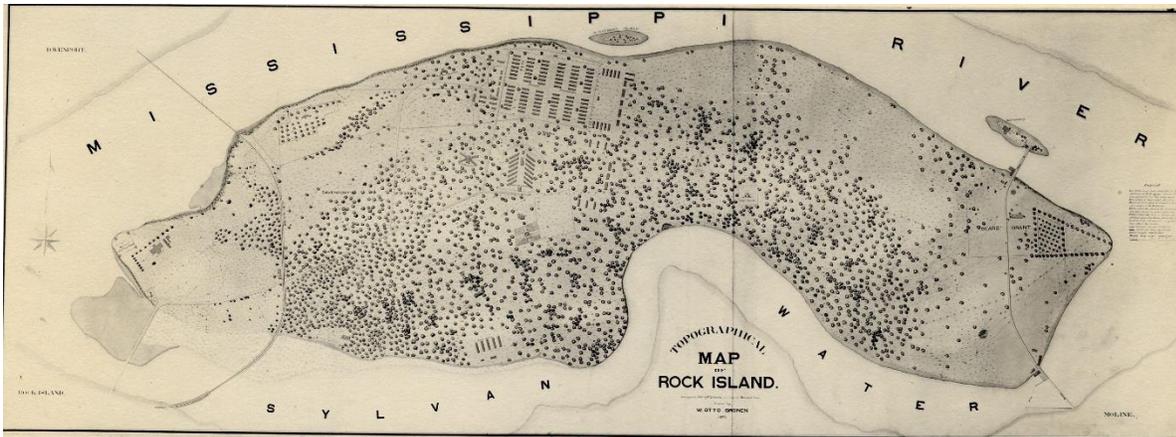
map of Rock Island Arsenal in 1870 and a plat map of the Confederate Cemetery in 1871. Because this plat map existed, the permanent markers installed at the Confederate Cemetery in 1912 identify the Confederate prisoners of war buried there as accurately as possible.

Gronen helped draw the plans for the 1896 Government Bridge that spanned the Mississippi River from Davenport, Iowa to Rock Island Arsenal, and he assisted in supervising the work. He was a personal friend of Ralph Modjeski, who designed the 1896 Government Bridge. The Government Bridge is still in use today and is one of only two in the world that has a swing span that rotates 360 degrees.

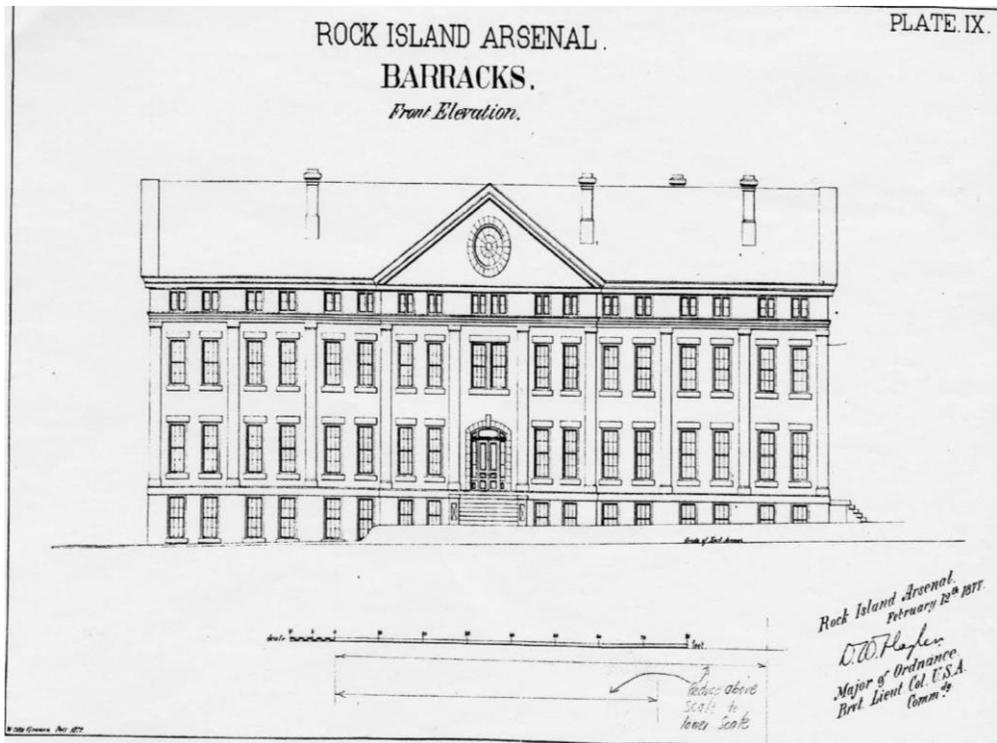
W. Otto Gronen lived in Davenport, Iowa, and was a member of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), August Wentz Post. As an avocation, he was a botanist to include creating amaryllis hybrids and botanical drawings. One of his amaryllis hybrids was named "Madame Modjeska," probably for Ralph Modjeski's mother, a popular stage actress. As a member of the Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences (present day Putnam Museum), Gronen created archaeological sketches of the academy's local excavations of Indian burial mounds. He died July 27, 1916.



W. Otto Gronen (first row, left) was one of nine employees at Rock Island Arsenal with the most seniority in 1912.



1870 map of Rock Island Arsenal hand drawn and colored by W. Otto Gronen. Map is in the collection of the Rock Island Arsenal Museum and is almost 7 feet long.



Drawing of Barracks Building, Building 90 today, at Rock Island Arsenal. Drawing completed by W. Otto Gronen and approved by Major D.W. Flagler, third Commanding Officer of Rock Island Arsenal, in 1877.