

**National Patriotic Instruction
Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War**

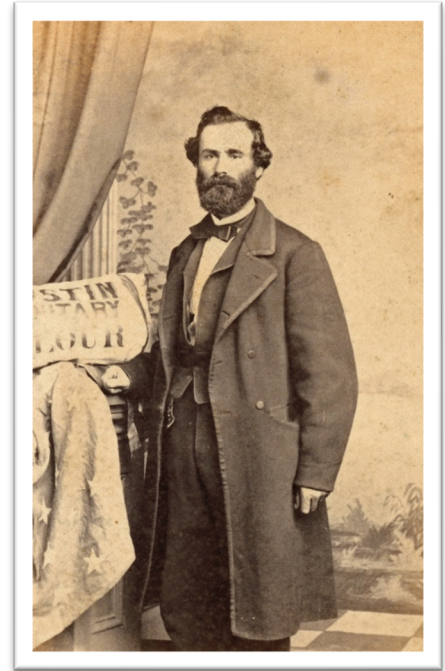
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**R. C. Gridley and
“That Sanitary Sack of Flour”**

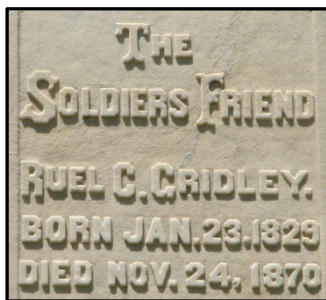
During the Civil War, citizens on the home front supported the war effort in innumerable ways – some of them very creative and novel. One of the more unique methods was that carried out – *quite literally* – by **MR. RUEL COLT GRIDLEY**.

In 1864, Gridley was living in Austin, Nevada, where he operated a grocery store. He supported the Democratic candidate for mayor and made a bet with a Republican friend that the loser would carry a fifty-pound sack of flour through the town. When he lost the bet, Gridley performed his punishment with the accompaniment of the town band, and at the end someone suggested that the sack should be auctioned off to raise money for the U.S. Sanitary Commission, which provided aid to wounded soldiers. After finally selling for \$250, the winning bidder refused to take the sack, but instead donated it back to Gridley to be auctioned off again. The sack of plain flour was auctioned repeatedly until over \$8,000 was raised. When nearby Virginia City, Nevada heard of the event (and where young newspaper editor Mark Twain was working at the time), they invited Gridley to come there, which he did. He then traveled to California, where San Franciscans donated \$2,800 and Sacramento citizens donated \$10,000, before he headed to St. Louis and the major eastern cities. These bidders added around \$170,000 to the Sanitary Commission’s fund, and within twelve months Gridley had raised more than \$250,000 with his sack of flour — equivalent to almost \$5 million today!

However, Gridley spent nearly all his savings to finance his nationwide tour, and when he returned to Austin, the silver boom had ebbed, and his business as a general store proprietor dwindled. His health declined and in 1868 he moved to Stockton, California, where his sister lived. He died in 1870 at just 41 years of age.



Gridley with his sack of flour



Inscription on Gridley’s monument in the GAR plot in Stockton, California

In 1887, the “Ruel Colt Gridley Monument” was dedicated in Stockton’s Rural Cemetery, with funds raised by the Rawlins Post No. 23, GAR and the citizens of Stockton. It depicts Gridley next to a large sack of flour and stands guard over the GAR plot.

Ruel Gridley’s remarkable story is detailed in a chapter of Mark Twain’s *Roughing It* (1872).

In Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty,

Tad D. Campbell, PCinC
National Patriotic Instructor