

Early History of Chicago Recalls 'Hannibal Guards'

First Race Military Unit in Illinois Was Founded 54 Years Ago

[Editor's Note—Don't fail to read "Chicago Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow." These articles will be found not only authentic, but informative as well. They will cover a period of 50 years, dealing with political facts largely unknown by the present generation.]

By A. N. FIELDS
 CHAPTER V

Out of the archives of memory and from the limited history of recorded events, interesting details are being brought to light of Chicago's early settlers—stories of hope and ambition and the courage of a people who were endeavoring to seek a place for themselves and for their posterity.

The history of early Chicago reads like a romance to one who attempts to make a mental journey through the stirring events of the past fifty years or more of Race life in this great cosmopolitan center.

HANNIBAL GUARDS FORMED IN 1872

Illinois military records disclose that an organization was formed by members of the Race in 1872, known as the Hannibal Guards. While it met with public approval, it soon



MAJOR JOHN C. BUCKNER

changed into a more aggressive organization, and in the course of time became known as the Cadets.

The majority of the men who comprised the new outfit were men of more or less military experience, having belonged to other national guard units from such states as Vermont, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Maryland. These men soon found it necessary to make another change, and this time they gave the organization the title of the Old Sixteenth.

During this struggle the state legislature made feeble appropriation for the sustenance of this new military arm of the state, but finally refused to extend further support at all and the Old Sixteenth was completely dropped from the roster of state troops.

SPARK OF PATRIOTISM IS AGAIN LIGHTED

However, the spark of patriotism was destined to again light the thought and imagination with a new desire to reorganize another military unit that would stand against the prejudice of the politician and take an honored place in the history of both the nation and the state.

To bring about this end the best thought of the leaders then was concentrated and on June 5, 1890, amid scenes of great enthusiasm the Ninth battalion came into being; this institution took the place of the Old Sixteenth, flinging its sails to the breeze under the guiding spirit of such men as John C. Buckner, J. C. Bish, B. G. Johnson, James C. Jordan, John R. Marshall and others.

While this new organization had its beginning in a flame of fanfare, it was nevertheless due to meet many setbacks before reaching the position of an acceptable unit of the state military forces. As years spent their course one of the founders of the effort to breathe into the life of the state a black military unit had weaved his way into the house of representatives and was a member of the 38th general assembly, which convened Jan. 9, 1895.

JOHN C. BUCKNER GOES TO LEGISLATURE

His name was John C. Buckner, elected from the Fifth district. While Mr. Buckner was not a man of much learning and was often wrong in the course he pursued, nevertheless he had the courage of his convictions. His activities in the Ninth battalion form a stormy chapter in its formative period.

Almost instantly upon Representative Buckner's entrance in the general assembly he ran contrary to the policies of the then governor, who was John R. Tanner, Republican, a native of Clay county. Being the lone member in the house of his Race it was never determined what was the purpose of Buckner's action.

However, he succeeded in having passed in that general assembly a bill which served the purpose of making room for the Ninth battalion as a part of the national guard of the state, and he himself was made its first commanding officer. While the first was a worthy achievement, the second was destined to bring sorrow and regret.

A crisis in the then Major Buckner's command came when he refused to properly participate with his command in the services of unveiling the statue to the memory of Maj. Gen. John A. Logan, United States volunteer. This incident occurred the 23d day of July, 1897.

COMMANDING OFFICER IS PLACED ON TRIAL

This act of insubordination on the part of the commanding officer of the battalion caused consternation, confusion and much embarrassment to the governor of the state; so much so that the major was placed on trial before a military court and found guilty.

Nov. 9, 1897, the findings of the military court martial were transmitted to his excellency, the governor.

This startling event in the life of the Ninth battalion again threatened to destroy its position as a national unit in the military affairs of the state. The wonder of its admirers at that time was: Would it again weather the storm?

The governor, at an appointed time and day, proceeded to put in effect the decision of the court, which was to wit that the said John C. Buckner be deprived of his command for the period of six months and that the said order be read to commands of the state.

This was a bitter pill for the major, but results could not be avoided; unfortunate was this incident because just at this time America was about to write a new history in national military pride. The Maine had been sunk in the harbor of Havana and President William McKinley was

calling the national guards to the colors.

JOHN R. MARSHALL IS ACTING COMMANDER

It was here that Capt. John R. Marshall enters the picture. Captain Marshall had held command during the suspension of Maj. John C. Buckner, but in the midst of this particular activity, the term of Buckner's suspension had expired and he was then making an effort to regain command of the battalion.

Pursuant to this effort the major journeyed to Springfield and held converse with his excellency, the governor. An understanding was arrived at between Buckner and Governor Tanner, whereby he (the governor) would reappoint Major Buckner to command of the Ninth, providing he (Buckner) placed his resignation in the hands of the governor to take effect at his pleasure. This Buckner did and was recommissioned. He wired Captain Marshall at Chicago to be prepared to turn over the command to him upon his arrival in Chicago. This was complied with and the proper preparation was made for the reception of the commander.

BUCKNER IS FINALLY RELIEVED OF COMMAND

Major Buckner arrived on an early evening train, was conducted to the armory and duly installed. While Major Buckner was in the midst of the ceremonies, another wire came from the governor, stating that he had accepted the resignation of Maj. John C. Buckner and that Capt. John R. Marshall had been appointed by the governor to take command of the Ninth battalion.

Major Buckner, wrapping around himself a mantle of faded glory, left the hall, which ended permanently his control over military affairs of the Ninth battalion. The cry was then from every part of the country,



CAPT. JOHN R. MARSHALL

"Avenge the lives of the 271 who had met watery graves in the harbor of Havana." The new commander of the Ninth at once began to prepare the company for whatever services might be required by the nation's chief.

CHAPTER VI

In the research being carried on we are continually finding evidences of progress made by members of the Race in Chicago during the past 50 years that have been lost with the passing years. We have only briefly touched upon the lives of men and women of that period and whose descendants were destined to become factors in the molding of Chicago's future place in history.

Hence, with grateful regard for the good name they left and the high civic, social and political impression upon the people and the community in their day, the task becomes a "love of labor" in trying to pass on to posterity some knowledge of their efforts.

REPRESENTATIVES ELECTED FROM THIRD DISTRICT

The convening of the 38th general assembly at Springfield, Ill., Jan. 4, 1895, found that a new Race representative had been elected from the Third district; his name was James E. Bish. Representative Bish served one term in the lower house with no noteworthy achievement credited to his record.

His presence there merely meant that the Race was represented at that session. He was honest and conscientious, but possessed no conspicuous ability for which he is to be condemned or praised.

In 1894 the Race citizens elected several delegates to the Republican county convention. These delegates represented two factions, one headed



EDWARD H. WRIGHT

by Theodore W. Jones, an influential business man of the city, and Edward H. Wright, a newcomer who was laying his political cables, which were destined to give him a safe place in history.

The fight was being made to nomi-

nate a Race man for member of the county board; the names of both Wright and Jones were presented. Wright, seeing there was no chance to nominate two Colored men, rose on the floor of the convention and withdrew his name and called upon his friends to join with the other faction to make sure that a Race man was on the county ticket.

Through the sound judgment of Wright, Theodore W. Jones was nominated on the first roll call. This was the beginning of what was to become a fruitful political and public career. As a result of Wright's vision in supporting Jones he received the support of the Jones faction in 1895 and was nominated and elected as South town clerk, the first Race man ever to hold the office and the first Republican elected to the office in 10 years.

In the performance of his duties as South town clerk, Mr. Wright demonstrated rare and exceptional ability. This was his first elective office and his conduct of it established the fact that when Edward H. Wright gave his word, he meant to keep it.

His administration of one year of the South town clerkship justified the Republican county leaders to select him for candidate for county commissioner in the convention of 1896. The ticket was elected and meanwhile Wright was weaving his way to political influence and power.

Through sheer ability he soon became a power on the county board. He was able by forethought and wisdom to divide the board into two political factions, with himself as the leader of one, and Dan Healy the other. This power was gained by him notwithstanding the fact that he was the only Race man on the board.

WRIGHT KEEPS WORD: DENEEN IS ELECTED

Historians who wrote in that day and time say of him that "he was the ablest member of the board and dominated its activities." Charles S. Deneen, who served one term in the lower house at Springfield, was angling for political prominence. He effected a deal with Wright, whereby he (Wright) was to give Deneen his support in the county convention for state's attorney, in return for which Wright was to name a Race man for assistant state's attorney in the event of Deneen's election.

Ed Wright kept his word; Deneen was nominated and subsequently elected. Time passed; Charlie seemed to have forgotten his promise. But Ed remembered that political promise and pay day had arrived.

Wright called upon Deneen to remind him that certain understandings and agreements had been entered into and his part had been delivered. Pursuant to that he informed Deneen that he (Wright) sent him (Deneen) the name of F. L. Barnett for appointment as assistant state's attorney and wanted to know when the appointment was going to be made. Of course, Deneen told him that he would get around to it soon.

Wright bided his time, but the appointment of Barnett continued to hang fire. Wright sent word after word inquiring about the appointment, but of no avail. Time continued to pass on, and finally Wright became irked by Deneen's procrastination and decided to use more effective means.

The county board was in session for the purpose of appropriating money for the various county offices; these appropriations were being passed one after the other until, finally, the appropriation for the state attorney's office became a subject for consideration.

Strange to say, the board had been in perfect harmony until they reached the appropriation for the state's attorney. It was then that Wright took the floor, and when he got through the appropriation for the office of state's attorney had been tied so tight that the state's attorney could not get enough money to pay his staff.

Deneen made infamy among the members of the board as to the reason for his appropriation not being



ATTY. FERDINAND L. BARNETT

passed. He was told that Commissioner Wright was sitting on the lid, so he called Wright on the phone and told him he (Deneen) wanted to see him.

Wright went over and Deneen said to him: "Ed, what's the idea of you holding up the appropriation for my office?" Wright replied: "You had an understanding with me that in the event of your election you would appoint F. L. Barnett assistant state's attorney and you have failed to keep your word; until that is done I shall continue to prevent the passage of your appropriation."

Deneen replied: "I am state's attorney of Cook county and you can't dictate to me." Wright on leaving the office shot back: "Yes, and I am county commissioner and you can't dictate to me." For the present it appeared that Deneen and Wright were through, but in a few days Barnett was appointed and soon thereafter Deneen's appropriation was made.

F. L. Barnett entered the office of state's attorney, in 1897, and remained there for 15 years. During his term he handled a number of important cases with honor and credit both to himself and to his sponsor. Before leaving the office Barnett became nationally famous as a habeas corpus expert.

Wright served two terms as county commissioner and during the second term, in the absence of the duly elected president of the board, he was made president, pro-tem, and served for three months. He presided at all meetings of the board and directed the affairs of the county.

While a member of the board Wright secured several outstanding appointments to Race men and women. His service both to the county and to his Race demonstrated his fitness for public office and public confidence.

(To Be Continued)