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“That We May Think Right, Vote Right, and Do Right”: Knoxville’s Black Community, 1865-1867

By Jason M. Yeatts*

In late 1865, northern journalist Whitelaw Reid traveled through Knoxville, Tennessee, a city of roughly 4,000 that had endured both Confederate and Union occupation. Reid learned quickly that violence had erupted immediately after the war, often between the city’s white Unionists and ex-Confederates. Now, in November, Reid noted that the violence between the city’s whites had ended, only to be quickly replaced by racially motivated hostility toward freedmen. In Reid’s opinion, “The freedmen have more hope from Virginia Rebels than from East Tennessee Loyalists, if the public sentiment of Knoxville may be accepted as a test.”¹ Within months after the close of the Civil War, race unified and divided postwar Knoxville.

Race played a significant role in the unification of former Union and Confederate whites in Knoxville. Historian Robert Tracy McKenzie asserted that after the war, white solidarity provided the foundation for “genuine reconciliation” between Knoxville’s white Unionists and rebels. The catalyst for this reconciliation occurred on February 13, 1866. On that day, a black soldier, who was guarding a surplus warehouse in the city, killed Lieutenant Colonel Calvin Dyer, a well-known local Union army veteran. Dyer had gone to the warehouse to pick up items he had purchased. The black guard, for whatever reason, perceived him as a threat, and shot and killed him. News of Dyer’s death spread rapidly, and within hours a white mob formed. By the end of the day, the black soldier’s body hung limp from a rope on Gay Street. McKenzie argued that this single event foreshadowed the racial tensions that would afflict Knoxville during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era.²

* The author is a doctoral student in history at the University of Tennessee, focusing on nineteenth century United States history.

¹ Whitelaw Reid, *After the War: A Tour of the Southern States, 1865-1866*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New York, 1965), 351-52.

² Robert Tracy McKenzie, *Lincolmites and Rebels: A Divided Town in the American Civil War* (New York, 2006), 220-223, 227-229; *Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig*, February 14 and 21, 1866; *New York Times*, February 25, 1866.

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Prejudice against freed blacks was prevalent throughout East Tennessee. Historian Charles Faulkner Bryan Jr. contended that most East Tennesseans, despite their wartime loyalties, refused to embrace freedmen as equal partners in society. He noted that "although East Tennessee was a locus of Southern Unionism, it is evident that this Unionism was marred by racial attitudes little different from that of the most devoted Confederates." Likewise, historian Benjamin Severance said that East Tennesseans "were actively Republican, yet openly Negrophobic," and Thomas Alexander added that an "aversion to Negro equality in any field . . . [was] characteristic of East Tennessee."³

Postwar race relations varied across the state's three regions. Major General Clinton Fisk, Assistant Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau for Kentucky and Tennessee, believed that race relations were most tense in East Tennessee. On January 30, 1866, Fisk testified in Congress before the Joint Committee on Reconstruction and stated:

It is a melancholy fact that among the bitterest opponents of the negro in Tennessee are the intensely radical loyalists of the mountain district. . . . In Middle Tennessee and in West Tennessee the largest and the wealthiest planters of the old slaveholding population have more cordially co-operated with me in my duties than the people of East Tennessee.⁴

Nearly four months earlier, several state senators from East Tennessee opposed a bill that would allow blacks to serve as competent witnesses in state courts. Senator Benjamin Frazier of Knox County protested saying:

I know the sentiments of my constituents, and am well assured that such a law would startle the whole community. The Union masses of East Tennessee, accepted abolition, not because they loved slavery less, but their country more. As to their love for the negro, I believe no portion of the State has such deep and settled prejudice against him as they have.

DeWitt C. Senter of Grainger County, an East Tennessee senator and later governor, also opposed the bill arguing that it would threaten the harmony of the Union Party.⁵

³ Charles Faulkner Bryan Jr., "The Civil War in East Tennessee: A Social, Political, and Economic Study" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1978), 299, 343; Benjamin H. Severance, "Loyalty's Political Vanguard: The Union League of Maryville, Tennessee, 1867-1869," *The Journal of East Tennessee History* 71 (1999): 27; Thomas B. Alexander, *Political Reconstruction in Tennessee* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1950), 100.

⁴ *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction, at the First Session Thirty-Ninth Congress* (Washington, D.C., 1866), 112.

⁵ *Nashville Daily Press and Times*, October 21 and 25, 1865.

Overall, contemporaries and historians have asserted that white East Tennesseans were a substantial barrier to black independence, and some observers like Fisk and Frazier claimed that blacks in East Tennessee suffered more at the hands of whites than anywhere else in the state. Allegedly, this prejudice was concentrated most visibly in Knoxville. According to this narrative, the city's white population oppressed and exploited the black community, and occasionally blacks suffered racially motivated violence. This depiction, however, exaggerates the bigotry that existed in the city and fails to tell the broader story of the black experience during the immediate postwar period.

A reexamination of this experience reveals that Knoxville was a hub of black progress and success, rather than a center of intense racial prejudice as described by Reid. In spite of marginalization, poverty, and prejudice, the black community in Knoxville flourished from 1865 to 1867 in the specific areas of religion, education, and politics. Knoxville's black community was complex, dynamic, and attained a considerable level of social and racial acceptance in an urban society ruled by white elites.

Slavery in Tennessee disintegrated in the midst of chaotic conditions. In June 1861, Tennessee seceded from the Union and by February of the next year Union forces had many strongholds across the state. By the end of 1863, federal troops controlled Tennessee. Historian John Cimprich contended that the length and intensity of the Union occupation was "a key disruptive factor" that helped to dismantle slavery in Tennessee. The presence of Union forces encouraged slaves to abandon their masters and to seek refuge in cities and in contraband camps. In cities, some escaped slaves moved into "outbuildings, abandoned homes, and rented rooms," while many others "concentrated in neighborhoods of their own" and erected wooden shacks.⁶

The influx of fugitive slaves into population centers, such as Nashville, Murfreesboro, Athens, Cleveland, and Chattanooga, heightened racial tensions. Nowhere were these anxieties more pronounced than in Memphis. Of all the Tennessee cities, Memphis had the largest black population, which consisted of black refugees and black Union soldiers. Black refugees, who lived primarily in contraband camps, were often employed to build roads and bridges, to cut wood, and to serve as soldiers. But they also had access to education—a new opportunity available to slaves. In several camps, federal officials organized grammar and industrial schools, taught by army chaplains and northern teachers. Historian Paul Phillips noted that former slaves put so much faith in the power of education that "they placed an overwhelming demand on their mentor-benefactors for booklearning, which, they believed, would unlock doors of opportunity in freedom."⁷

⁶ John Cimprich, *Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865* (Tuscaloosa, 1985), 5, 19-32, 47.

⁷ Lester C. Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee 1797-1970* (Knoxville, 1981), 29, 33, 44; Paul David Phillips, "Education of Blacks in Tennessee During Reconstruction, 1865-1870," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 46 (1987): 98.

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⁹ J.W. Alvord, *...* D.C., 1867), 6
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After the war, contraband camps soon closed, and the Freedmen's Bureau, which Congress established in March 1865, took charge of providing aid to white refugees and freed blacks. By early October 1865, the Bureau's Assistant Commissioner Fisk reported that camps had closed in Nashville, Memphis, Clarksville, Gallatin, Hendersonville, Murfreesboro, Pulaski, and Chattanooga. Many blacks left the camps to establish homes in the countryside. Fisk noted that the "exodus from crowded cities and towns to farms has been large." Yet, thousands of blacks remained in urban areas. Cities offered blacks an expanded range of employment opportunities. Blacks in Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, Knoxville, and other cities worked as domestic servants, barbers, drivers, firemen, and common laborers. More educated urban freedmen worked as independent businessmen, lawyers, physicians, teachers, and skilled laborers in manufacturing.⁸

Urban blacks had educational opportunities that rural blacks often lacked. In general, the Freedmen's Bureau, together with northern churches and benevolent societies, worked primarily to organize black schools in urban centers. In the summer of 1867, Major General William P. Carlin, the new Assistant Commissioner for Tennessee, stated that freedmen schools were flourishing in the state's large cities, but "few schools [had] been established in the smaller towns and villages, and very few in the country." A year earlier, Benjamin Runkle, the Bureau's Sub-Assistant in Memphis, reported that large numbers of blacks in West Tennessee had moved into the city for the sole purpose of receiving an education. Even so, all black schools, whether in the city or the countryside, struggled under the weight of violence, poverty, inexperienced teachers, and scant political support. But these challenges failed, for the most part, to curb blacks' determination to obtain an education in the immediate postwar years. By January 1869, the Bureau's Superintendent of Education for Tennessee, James Thompson, praised the state's black schools, claiming that overall they stood in excellent condition. He gave special applause to the schools in Nashville, which he said compared "favorably with any white schools in the same grades." When the Bureau finally closed its educational work in Tennessee in the summer of 1870, blacks owned over half the buildings and grounds of the state's freedmen schools.⁹

Of the state's major cities, Nashville provided black Tennesseans with the most favorable urban conditions for building communities, obtaining

⁸ *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1872*, M1911 (Washington, D.C., 2005), 1; *Nashville Daily Press and Times*, October 21, 1865; Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee, 1865-1880* (Washington, D.C., 1941), 141-45, 152-55.

⁹ J.W. Alvord, *Fourth Semi-Annual Report on Schools for Freedmen, July 1, 1867* (Washington, D.C., 1867), 68; Taylor, *Negro in Tennessee*, 174; Phillips, "Education of Blacks," 100-101. In early 1869, the Freedmen's Bureau withdrew most of its officers from the southern states, leaving in place only education superintendents and claims agents. In the summer of 1870, the agency removed its education superintendents, and in June 1872, Congress terminated the Bureau. See, *Records of the Field Offices for the State of Tennessee*, 2.

education, and accessing public services. According to historian Don Doyle, the city emerged from the Civil War as one of the South's "most aggressive centers of economic development and social change." Its business class—financiers, merchants, and manufacturers—became leading promoters of the New South movement, second only to businessmen in Atlanta. Yet, in order to establish Nashville as a powerful economic force, the city's businessmen faced tough questions about how to handle the large black population. In a post-slavery world, what economic and political roles would blacks play? To what extent were whites responsible for training blacks for these roles? And how could racial tensions be mitigated so that a peaceful biracial labor force could be maintained? Ultimately, Nashville's elites promoted policies that preserved white supremacy—what Doyle called "the new paternalism"—but also gave blacks "limited public support to improve their health, education, and welfare." But the extension of black liberties was not only the product of white men's benevolence. For their part, Nashville's freedmen struggled diligently for the full benefits of citizenship. In 1865, black leaders organized the first State Convention of Colored Men, which met annually in Nashville for two decades. That same year, blacks in Nashville unsuccessfully petitioned the state legislature for the right to vote, arguing that the government could give "the colored man . . . a vote as safely as it trusted him with a bayonet." Also, the city's freedmen, together with northern missionary societies, established schools to train black teachers: Fisk University and Central Tennessee College (now part of Trevecca Nazarene University) in 1865 and Roger Williams University in 1867. The black community flourished in Nashville largely because local leaders considered the black minority a greater economic advantage than a political or social danger.¹⁰

However, urban blacks in postwar Tennessee suffered prejudice, unemployment, poor living conditions, and segregation from whites. Whereas the countryside offered space to maintain some racial distance, cities forced whites and blacks to walk the same streets, shop at the same markets, work in the same buildings, and compete for the same jobs. At best, these close urban interactions remained tense but peaceful. At worst, they erupted into violence. In Memphis in May 1866, what started as a small clash between policemen and discharged black soldiers grew into a citywide riot against the black community. One historian has argued that economic competition between the city's blacks and Irish immigrants created a volatile environment. Violence also erupted in other parts of the South. Nearly three months after the Memphis riot, a race riot erupted in New Orleans, killing over thirty blacks.¹¹

¹⁰ Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill, 1990), xv, 260-61; Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee*, 36, 41, 48.

¹¹ Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York, 1978), 19-30; Paul David Phillips, "White Reaction to the Freedmen's Bureau in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 25 (1966): 57; James G. Hollandsworth Jr., *An Absolute Massacre: The New Orleans Race Riot of July 30, 1866* (Baton Rouge, 2001).

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Postwar Tennessee suffered prejudice, discrimination, and segregation from whites. Whites sought to maintain some racial distance, and blacks sought to talk the same streets, shop at the same stores, and compete for the same jobs. At the same time, the city remained tense but peaceful. At worst, the city was divided in May 1866, what started as a small riot between white and black soldiers grew into a citywide riot. As the historian has argued that economic conditions and Irish immigrants created a volatile situation in other parts of the South. Nearly three years later, a riot erupted in New Orleans, killing

The black experience in postwar Knoxville resembled the conditions found in other Tennessee cities, as urban blacks renegotiated their power in the new racial, social, and economic order. Knoxville underwent rapid changes between 1861 and 1867. During the Civil War, Knoxville's white residents divided between Unionist and Confederate sympathies and suffered constant military occupation. For the first half of the war, Confederate troops occupied the city. In late August 1863, Confederate forces, facing the threat of a powerful Union attack, abandoned the city and forfeited it to General Ambrose Burnside's Army of the Ohio. In November, Confederate troops under the command of General James Longstreet attempted to recapture the city during the Battle of Fort Sanders, but failed. Until the war's end, Union troops remained in Knoxville.¹²

The presence of the Union army resulted in the emancipation of local slaves. Within weeks of the arrival of troops in early September 1863, slaves from surrounding counties flocked to Knoxville. Military leaders used these fugitive slaves to help the Union cause. Some blacks worked as laborers, while others enlisted in the army. In early 1864, hundreds of black men in the city joined what would become the 1st Regiment Heavy Artillery, Colored Troops (US). By January 1865, the unit numbered 1,800 men and encamped



In early 1864, hundreds of black Knoxvilleans, including Corporal Chance Cox, joined the 1st Regiment Heavy Artillery, Colored Troops (US). By January 1865, the unit numbered 1,800 men and encamped on the city's outskirts. From *The History of Blacks in Knoxville, Tennessee: The First One Hundred Years, 1791-1891* (Knoxville, 1990), 17.

¹⁰ *South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1866*, Blacks in Tennessee, 36, 41, 48.

¹¹ *The Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York, 1978), 151; *From Slavery to the Freedmen's Bureau in Tennessee*, 157; James G. Hollandsworth Jr., *An Absolute Riot*, 1866 (Baton Rouge, 2001).

¹² McKenzie, *Lincolns and Rebels*, 142, 165-72. For a detailed study of the deep and violent divisions between Unionist and Confederate sympathizers throughout East Tennessee during the war and Reconstruction, see Noel C. Fisher, *War at Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerrilla Violence in East Tennessee, 1860-1869* (Chapel Hill, 1997). Two important studies that analyze the extent and nature of Confederate support in East Tennessee during and after the war are: Todd W. Groce, *Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates and the Civil War, 1860-1870* (Knoxville, 1999); and John D. Fowler, *Mountaineers in Gray: The Nineteenth Tennessee Volunteer Infantry Regiment, C.S.A.* (Knoxville, 2004).

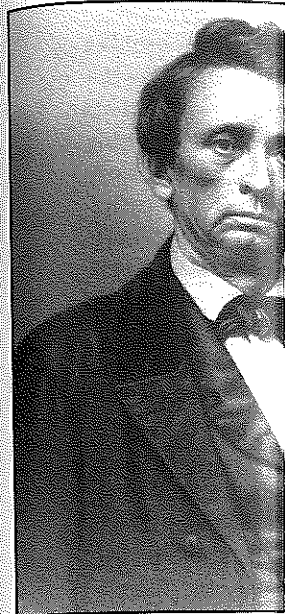
on the city's outskirts. The military presence fostered the growth of the black population in Knoxville. In 1860, blacks numbered 752, or 20.3 percent of the city's population. By 1870 the black population had increased to 3,149, or 30.1 percent.¹³

Immediately after the war, turmoil plagued the city. As ex-Confederates returned to Knoxville, they faced hostility from local Unionists, which sometimes led to violence. In early September 1865, Confederate veteran Abner Baker entered the Knox County courthouse, where he shot and killed Union army veteran Will Hall. Baker was immediately jailed. But within hours, a large group of federal soldiers took Baker out of the prison and hanged him. Just a month earlier, J. Crozier Ramsey, a prominent local Confederate sympathizer who had fled to Nashville, reported to his sister in Charlotte, North Carolina, that sentiment in Knoxville remained hostile toward rebels and that atrocities were frequently committed against Confederate sympathizers. Ellen Renshaw House, a Confederate supporter living in Knoxville, recorded in her diary in August 1865 that violence between ex-Confederates and Unionists had become so bad that "no mans life is safe." But these hostilities were short lived. In February 1866, Abner Jackson, a resident of Knox County, noted that wartime animosities were "confined to very low people" in the county; ex-Confederate and Union officers mingled harmoniously. By the spring of 1866, J. Crozier Ramsey received reports that tensions had eased in Knoxville.¹⁴

As violence between Unionists and ex-Confederates declined, Reconstruction politics took center stage. After the war, Republicans (most of the former Unionists) gained control of Tennessee's government. In March 1865, William G. Brownlow, an East Tennessee newspaper editor and staunch Unionist, was elected governor. He moved quickly to cement his party's power by advocating for the disfranchisement of former Confederates in Tennessee. In June 1865, the General Assembly passed a franchise act that limited the vote to free white males who were "known to have entertained unconditional Union sentiments from the outbreak of rebellion to the present time." Nonetheless, conservatives remained a political threat. In August 1865, they gained five of the state's eight congressional districts, and in March of the next year they swept county elections in Middle and West Tennessee. Brownlow responded by calling for a revision of the franchise law. Many East Tennesseans threatened to secede from the state if ex-Confederates were not more thoroughly restricted from voting. The legislature soon

¹³ McKenzie, *Lincolmites and Rebels*, 142, 183-86; Michael J. McDonald and William Bruce Wheeler, *Knoxville, Tennessee: Continuity and Change in an Appalachian City* (Knoxville, 1983), 27.

¹⁴ McKenzie, *Lincolmites and Rebels*, 218-19; Daniel E. Sutherland, ed., *A Very Violent Rebel: The Civil War Diary of Ellen Renshaw House* (Knoxville, 1996), 181; Joint Committee on Reconstruction, 128; J. Crozier Ramsey to E.A.R. Breck, August 5, 1865, Ramsey Family Papers, University of Tennessee Special Collections (hereinafter UTSC).



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¹⁵ Gordon B. McKinnon, *Community (Chapel and the Restoration 144; Kyle Osborn, Postwar East Tennessee L. Slap (Lexington, 1863-1877 (New York Tennessee, 1860-1890 "Statement of the 1867, to July 1, 1866 Bureau of Refugee and Records Administration Brownlow to Joseph 1865-1869, UTSC, A week before the had developed in some conservatives according to the July one white man and of blacks during his 163-83.*

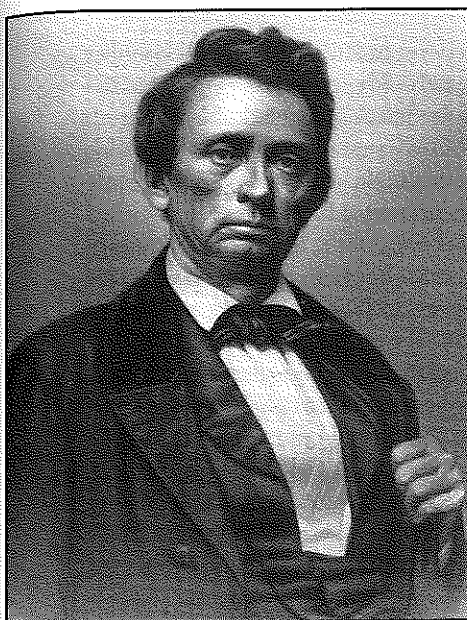
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William Gannaway Brownlow, a
minister, journalist, and politician, was a
fixture of Tennessee politics in the 1860s.
While governor, from 1865 to 1869,
he expanded the electorate to include
freedmen in Tennessee. Engraving by
J.C. Buttre, 1870, from the University
of Tennessee Special Collections.

yielded to the political pressure
and in May 1866 revised the
suffrage law to make it harder for
ex-Confederates to register to vote.
Furthermore, in February of the
next year, Republicans passed a
bill that gave black men the right
to vote. In the end, both suffrage
changes benefited the Republican
Party in the gubernatorial election
of August 1867, but not without a

fierce backlash from conservatives. Violence broke out throughout the state
just weeks before the August election. In Knoxville, a small riot erupted in
late July, resulting in the death of a black man.¹⁵

The summer of 1867, though, was not the first time freedmen in
Knoxville suffered racially motivated violence—attacks had occurred since
the first months that followed the end of the Civil War. Black soldiers were
particularly vulnerable to violent situations. As the only troops on active
duty, the 1st Colored Artillery had the initial responsibility of policing the
city. This became difficult in the summer of 1865, when Union veterans of
the 8th, 9th, and 13th regiments of the Tennessee Cavalry descended on the

¹⁵ Gordon B. McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community* (Chapel Hill, 1978), 34-35; Eugene G. Feistman, "Radical Disfranchisement and the Restoration of Tennessee, 1865-1866," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 12 (1953): 140, 144; Kyle Osborn, "Reconstructing Race: Parson Brownlow and the Rhetoric of Race in Postwar East Tennessee," in *Reconstructing Appalachia: The Civil War's Aftermath*, ed. Andrew L. Slap (Lexington, 2010), 173; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, 1988), 270; James Welch Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee, 1860-1890* (Chapel Hill, 1934), 117-18; *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, July 30, 1867; "Statement of the Number of Persons Murdered in the State of Tennessee from July 1, 1867, to July 1, 1868," Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1869, National Archives and Records Administration (hereinafter NARA), M-999, Reel 34, Target 2; William Brownlow to Joseph Cooper, July 25, 1867, Governor William G. Brownlow Papers, 1865-1869, UTSC, available through the Volunteer Voices <http://www.volunteervoices.org>. A week before the Knoxville riot, *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig* reported that a mob spirit had developed in Knox County. In the July 24, 1867 issue of *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig* some conservatives threatened that "they would have certificates to vote or fight." Also, according to the July 25, 1867 *Knoxville Daily Free Press*, a riot erupted in Rogersville, leaving one white man and one black man dead. For an analysis of Brownlow's shifting perceptions of blacks during his governorship from 1865 to 1869, see Osborn, "Reconstructing Race," 163-83.

city to be paid and mustered out of service. In late August, a black soldier attempted to arrest a drunken veteran of the 8th Tennessee. A friend of the veteran tried forcibly to stop the arrest. In defense, the black soldier ran his bayonet through the friend. The entire 8th Tennessee responded by vowing to kill every black soldier in the streets that night. Several days later, a black soldier was found dead, floating in the Tennessee River with a musket tied to his back. And, as already noted, in February 1866, a mob hanged a black soldier for killing Colonel Dyer. Concerning this last incident, however, the evidence suggests that the rapid hanging of the black guard had more to do with the death of Colonel Dyer than with the race of the perpetrator.¹⁶

Blacks in postwar Tennessee also faced economic challenges. In the fall of 1865, Knoxville's city government denied blacks the right to be retailers in the public market. This ruling may have been a response to the actions of a local black man, James Taylor. In September 1865, Taylor bought a stock of peaches and resold them "by the Dozen for speculation." The Market Master quickly ended Taylor's enterprise and fined him for breaking the market's rule against speculation. The local Freedmen's Bureau agent appealed the case to the City Recorder on behalf of Taylor, but the fine stuck. Whether or not the restriction against black retailers was a direct response to Taylor, it was certainly an attempt by the city's government to curb black businesses in the marketplace.¹⁷

The most blatant forms of racial prejudice originated from poor whites. In November 1865, journalist Whitelaw Reid observed that an "inborn poor-white hatred of the negroes" pervaded Knoxville. The following year, in September, the Freedmen's Bureau Superintendent for Knox County, S.W. Groesbeck, reported that the city's policemen showed a strong prejudice against blacks. In some instances, they beat or imprisoned blacks "for reasons existing in their prejudices for the negro only, and not for any violation of laws." According to Groesbeck, the policemen's behavior was "a reliable index to the feelings and sentiments of the [city's] more ignorant white inhabitants toward the Blacks."¹⁸

Although racially motivated violence and bigotry existed in Knoxville, as in other Tennessee cities, it was the exception, not the rule. The growing black community gained a level of respect and acceptance not seen in many other parts of East Tennessee. In November 1866, Samuel Walker, Groesbeck's replacement as the Freedmen's Bureau Superintendent for Knox

County, reported that "the blacks are industrious; with few exceptions they are honest. The Civil War has extended to them all the benefits of the law by existing laws." Ultimately, a favorable urban environment in this mountain city threatened to build a thriving community. Rather, it was socially and economically and sometimes black leadership differences. But despite these successes. In the immediate postwar, established churches, and significant political influence.

Black churches were a central part of the community. The church building served as a center for schools, political events, and social life. The church also stood at the center of the community throughout the South, and the combined their resources. This was certainly true in Knoxville, where the church began to assert their right to the city and continued to labor vigorously.

Blacks in Knoxville began to build their own churches in 1864. Three black members of the First Baptist Church and the Presbyterian Church. S.W. T. Embry and formally the church. In a short time, the congregation of the church, but it eventually built a new building. It is unknown if they quickly moved to a new building. The congregation invited a new pastor.¹⁹

Black Presbyterian churches sought religious independence.

¹⁶ McKenzie, *Lincolmites and Rebels*, 214; Sutherland, ed., *Very Violent Rebel*, 183-84. After Dyer's murder, *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig* published two articles, February 14 and March 28, 1866, praising his character and patriotism. In neither of these pieces is his killer mentioned, suggesting that the killer's race mattered little to those who mourned Dyer's death.

¹⁷ Bryan, "Civil War in East Tennessee," 342; Steven Hahn, et al., eds., *Land and Labor, 1865* (Chapel Hill, 2008), 707-708.

¹⁸ Reid, *After the War*, 352; "Report of S.W. Groesbeck," September 1, 1866, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-999, Reel 34, Target 2.

¹⁹ "Report of M.H. Church," 1866, all in Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee, M-999, Reel 34, Target 2.

²⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 88-89.

²¹ Charles W. Cansler, "No Holston Country: A History of the Black Community in Knoxville, 1864-1946," 315; Sharyn Owens, "The Black Community in Knoxville, 1864-1946," *Black Tennessean* (Knoxville), 1975, *Standard History of Knoxville*.

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September 1, 1866, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-999, Reel 34, Target 2.

County, reported that "freedmen are quiet and peaceable, and generally industrious; with few exceptions the whites treat them kindly and deal with them honestly. The Civil Authorities particularly of this city are disposed to extend to them all the rights and privileges to which they are entitled by existing laws." Ultimately, Knoxville, like Nashville, provided blacks a favorable urban environment in which to taste the fruits of liberty. It was in this mountain city that blacks overcame social and political obstacles to build a thriving community. To be sure, theirs was not a unified community. Rather, it was socially and economically diverse. Internal squabbles occurred, and sometimes black leaders used the Freedmen's Bureau to mediate their differences. But despite the challenges, the city's blacks achieved many successes. In the immediate postwar years, leaders of the black community established churches, created educational opportunities, and gained significant political influence.¹⁹

Black churches were the centerpiece of Knoxville's black community. The church building served multiple purposes. The structures accommodated schools, political events, and social gatherings. Along with the family, the church also stood at the center of black life. After gaining freedom, blacks throughout the South withdrew from predominately white congregations, combined their resources, and established churches of their own. This was certainly true in Knoxville. During the Union occupation, blacks in the city began to assert their right to religious self-determination. After the war, they continued to labor vigorously for their religious independence.²⁰

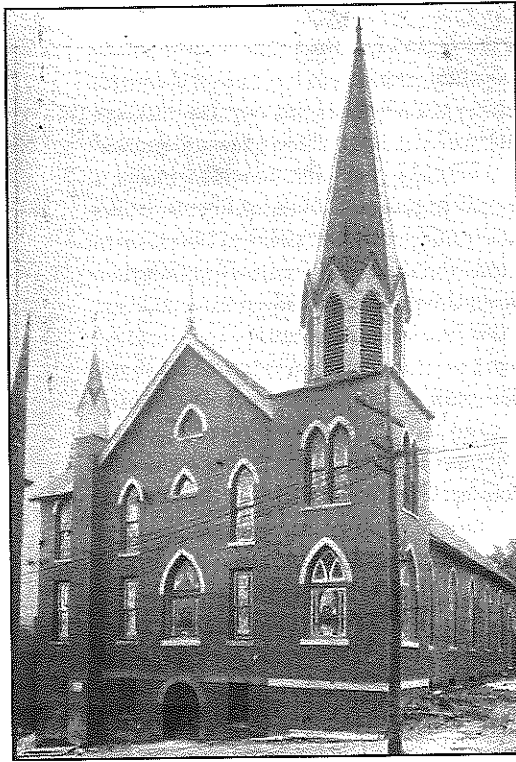
Blacks in Knoxville made their first push for religious independence in 1864. Three black members left Knoxville's integrated but white-controlled First Baptist Church and began meeting in the basement of the First Presbyterian Church. Soon after, they acquired the pastoral services of Rev. T. Embry and formally organized the Mount Zion Baptist Church. For a short time, the congregation worshiped in the basement of the Presbyterian Church, but it eventually moved to the city's old Methodist Episcopal building. It is unknown how long the congregation used this building, but they quickly moved to a black schoolhouse in East Knoxville. In 1866, the congregation invited Rev. William Howell, from Ohio, to serve as its new pastor.²¹

Black Presbyterians imitated their Baptist brethren and also sought religious independence after the war. Eleven black members of the Second

¹⁹ "Report of M.H. Church," November 6, 1866; "Report of M.H. Church," October 30, 1866, all in Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-999, Reel 34, Target 2.

²⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 88-92.

²¹ Charles W. Cansler, "Negro Life in Knox County and Knoxville," in *The French Broad-Holston Country: A History of Knox County, Tennessee*, ed. Mary U. Rothrock (Knoxville, 1946), 315; Sharyn Owens, "Mount Zion Baptist Church: Knoxville, Tennessee, 1860-1975," *Black Tennessean* (1976): 7-8; William Rule, George F. Mellen, and J. Woodbridge, *Standard History of Knoxville, Tennessee* (Chicago, 1900), 439.



Built in 1866 the Logan Chapel served as the home for the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (A.M.E. Zion). In the late 1860s the church served as a meeting place for black leaders and also as the location for the Winan School.

From *The Negro and East Tennessee*, comp. R.S. Beard (Knoxville, 1913).

Presbyterian Church wanted a separate congregation from whites, but lacked financial resources and a pastor. A visit from Henry H. Garnett (a very prominent and well-educated northern black clergyman), however, addressed those two needs. In May 1865, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. met in New York to discuss the church's mission to southern blacks. The assembly's leadership appointed

Garnett and John B. Reeve to "look after the interests of such colored people in the South as might desire to identify themselves with the Presbyterian Church." After the meeting, Garnett traveled to Knoxville. When he arrived, he learned that eleven black Presbyterians wanted a church of their own. That summer, a relationship of trust developed, and Garnett offered them enough financial resources to set up their own church. As a result, on September 4, 1865, they established the First Colored Presbyterian Church (later called Shiloh Presbyterian Church), which was arguably the first black Presbyterian church organized in the South.²²

In February 1866, Rev. George W. LeVere, a black missionary from New York who had served as a chaplain for the 20th Colored Volunteer Infantry during part of the war, came to Knoxville to serve as the pastor. His first months proved difficult, but by the end of the year conditions improved. Membership and funding swelled. Eventually, the congregation purchased a lot on Clinch Street and in December 1866 erected its first building. The accomplishment caught the attention of *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, which announced completion of the building on December 12, 1866.²³

²² Rule, et al., *Standard History*, 434-35; Cansler, "Negro Life," 315.

²³ Rule, et al., *Standard History*, 434-35; Cansler, "Negro Life," 315; *Brownlow's Knoxville*

Around the religious independence. In 1865, under the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Anderson arrived and opened an ice cream parlor, many whites in the city saying, "Alfred Anderson is part of the city of Knoxville business, but by the time he emerged after the war, his pastorate, Logan Chapel, its own house of worship, building." In sum, a Baptist, a Presbyterian and a church buildings.

Knoxville's activity, they also schools. By the of 1867, black schools in the basement of the city's black Methodist Presbyterian of These schools, were not the the city. In 1867, Ann Scott Cansler, daughter of a mulatto) and R. Cansler (a white northerner) opened, separate schools for blacks. Cansler, the Burnsides, arguably Knoxville organized black

Whig, December 12, 1866, to Knoxville. See Records of the Freedmen's Refugees, Freedmen's numbers).

²⁴ Cansler, "Negro Life," 451-52; U.S. Census, Knoxville *Whig*.

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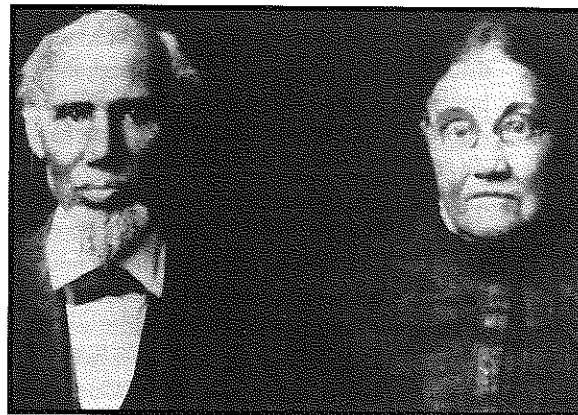
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Around the time that black Presbyterians in Knoxville were achieving religious independence, a group of black Methodists were doing the same. In 1865, under the leadership of Rev. Alfred Anderson, the Logan Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (A.M.E. Zion) was established. Anderson arrived in Knoxville in 1855 as a twenty-year-old free black and opened an ice cream shop on Main Street. He quickly gained the favor of many whites in the city. On June 28, 1855, the *Knoxville Register* praised him, saying, "Alfred Anderson has superior ice cream served daily and sent to any part of the city on order." It is unknown how long Anderson operated his business, but by 1860 he was employed as a Methodist preacher. Anderson emerged after the war as a prominent black leader in Knoxville. During his pastorate, Logan Chapel grew rapidly. At the end of 1866, the church erected its own house of worship, described in the *Whig* as a "commodious brick building." In sum, by the end of 1865, black Knoxvilleians had established a Baptist, a Presbyterian, and a Methodist church, and a year later, the Presbyterian and Methodist congregations had successfully erected their own church buildings.²⁴

Knoxville's black churches functioned as more than centers of religious activity, they also housed schools. By the summer of 1867, black schools met in the basements of the city's black Methodist and Presbyterian churches. These schools, however, were not the first in the city. In 1864, Laura Ann Scott Cansler (the daughter of a free-born mulatto) and R.J. Creswell (a white northerner) opened, separately, two schools for the city's blacks. Cansler started the Burnside School, arguably Knoxville's first organized black school,



In 1864, Laura Ann Scott Cansler, here with her husband Lawson Cansler, opened the Burnside School, arguably Knoxville's first organized black school. From Robert J. Booker, *Two Hundred Years of Black Culture in Knoxville, Tennessee, 1791 to 1991* (Virginia Beach, 1993), 38.

Whig, December 12, 1866. Interestingly, LeVere used the Freedmen's Bureau to travel to Knoxville. See, "Report of No. 19, Knoxville School—Rev. LeVere," November 1867, Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1870, NARA, M-1000, Reel 8 (no target numbers).

²⁴ Cansler, "Negro Life," 311, 315 (quoting *Knoxville Register*); Rule, et al., *Standard History*, 451-52; U.S. Census, 1860, Population Schedules, Knox County, Tennessee; Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig*, January 9, 1867.



Gay Street in Knoxville, 1869. During the Civil War R.J. Creswell opened a school for blacks in the abandoned Baptist Church on Gay Street. From the McClung Historical Collection, Knoxville.

after receiving permission from General Ambrose Burnside. In May 1864, Creswell opened a school in the abandoned First Baptist Church on Gay Street. Union authorities had forced the congregation to abandon the building. The school boasted an enrollment of more than one-hundred students. On the whole, black education blossomed in the summer of 1864. A white resident of Loudon noted in June that a female slave from the town had run away and settled close to Knoxville so she could go to school.²⁵

The location of Creswell's school quickly came into question. In October 1864, Union military officials returned the church building to the Baptist congregation, and the congregation's leaders forced Creswell's school to vacate. A deacon explained that it was the church's policy that no part of the building could be used for anything other than "religious services connected with the Baptist church." Creswell struggled to secure a new space for the school. Eventually, he procured an old blacksmith shop for \$20 per month, but financial difficulties continued. In the fall of 1864, Creswell decided to put his school under the supervision of the Freedmen's Mission of the United Presbyterian Church (FMUPC).²⁶

²⁵ "Statement Respecting School Property and Repairs in East Tennessee," June 4, 1867, Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000, Reel 6, Target 3; Booker, *Two Hundred Years*, 37-38; R.W. McGranahan, ed., *Historical Sketches of the Freedmen's Missions of the United Presbyterian Church, 1862-1904* (Knoxville, 1904), 22-23; Mary Jane Reynolds to Simeon D. Reynolds, June 20, 1864, Mary Jane Johnston Reynolds Letters, 1864, UTSC.

²⁶ Bryan, "Civil War in East Tennessee," 323-24; McGranahan, *Historical Sketches*, 22. McGranahan notes that after Creswell came under the supervision of the FMUPC, his sister, Lizzie G. Creswell, was hired as a second teacher.

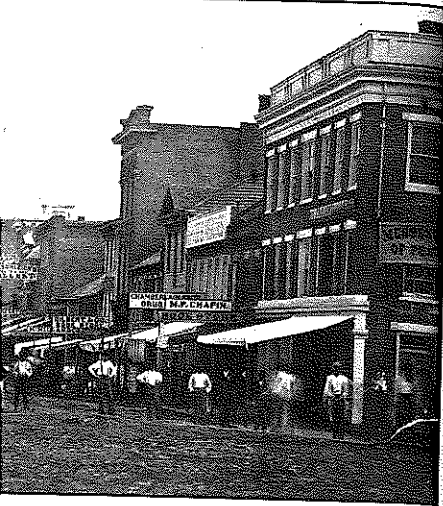
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After the war R.J. Creswell opened a school for
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Ambrose Burnside. In May 1864, the
First Baptist Church on Gay
Street asked the congregation to abandon the
building in favor of more than one-hundred
other places. Burnside died in the summer of 1864.
That a female slave from the town
came so she could go to school.²⁵
The school quickly came into question. In
the fall of 1864, the church building was
turned over to the Freedmen's Bureau.
The church's policy that no part
of the building was for other than "religious services"
struggled to secure a new space.
In the fall of 1864, Creswell
opened a school in the old blacksmith shop for \$20 per
month. In the fall of 1864, Creswell
opened the Freedmen's Mission
School (C).²⁶

Chairs in East Tennessee," June 4, 1867,
Records of the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000,
Reel 6, Target 1; R.W. McGranahan, ed., *Historical
Sketches of the Presbyterian Church, 1862-1904* (Knoxville,
Tennessee: Reynolds, June 20, 1864, Mary Jane

McGranahan, *Historical Sketches*, 22.
Under the supervision of the FMUPC, his
church.

After the war, the Burnside School continued to flourish, but for
unknown reasons Cansler did not report to the Freedmen's Bureau. From
1865 to 1867, her school is absent from the Freedmen's Bureau's monthly
school reports. Even so, some evidence suggests that it continued as a self-
sustaining school. In a letter to the Freedmen's Bureau Head, Major General
O.O. Howard, in November 1865, Assistant Commissioner Fisk noted that
at least one black school in Knoxville, most likely the Burnside School,
sustained itself independently.²⁷

The Freedmen's Bureau most likely never established a school or held
school property in Knoxville but rather supported the work of benevolent
organizations—transporting teachers, subsidizing the purchase of land and
buildings, paying teachers' salaries, and helping pay for building repairs.
One of the earliest benevolent organizations to work in Knoxville was
the Cincinnati-based Western Freedmen's Aid Commission. It opened
a school on June 26, 1865, employing four white and two black teachers.
As of November 1865, the school enrolled 253 black students, with an
average attendance of 163. Nearly half of the students could read. Even so,
the school struggled to survive as the white Methodist church that housed
it ordered it to vacate immediately that same month. The school needed
assistance fast. Thomas Brigham, the superintendent for the Commission
in Knoxville, wrote to the Freedmen's Bureau: "We are trying to build a
church and school house. [We] would respectfully [sic] solicit help from the
Freedmen's Bureau." It is unknown what happened to the Commission's
work in Knoxville. After November, its school vanished from the Freedmen's
Bureau's monthly school reports.²⁸

The FMUPC thrived in Knoxville after the war, but not without some
challenges. In the fall of 1865, the FMUPC purchased a government building
for \$180. But before the school could open, a group of hostile citizens burned
the building to the ground. The FMUPC, though, viewed the incident as
an anomaly, arguing that only a handful of the city's whites had committed
the crime and did not represent the views of the entire white community.
In general, R.J. Creswell praised white Knoxvilleans, saying, "The whites
[in Knoxville] are more friendly than at any other Post." In the spring of
1866, the FMUPC faced another challenge when a group of aggressive whites
ordered Creswell to "close up his nigger schools and go north." Creswell

²⁷ Booker, *Two Hundred Years*, 38; Henry Lee Swint, ed., "Reports From Education Agents of
the Freedmen's Bureau in Tennessee, 1865-1870," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 1 (1942):
56. Freedmen's Bureau agents knew that some independent black schools chose not to
report to the agency. They also knew that some teachers exploited the system; that is, they
opened a school, got paid, and then closed it.

²⁸ D. Burt, "Semi-Annual Report of the Condition of Freedmen's Schools for the Year
Ending June 29, 1867," Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of
Tennessee, NARA, M-1000, Reel 6, Target 1; "Report of the Aid Association of Western
Freedmen in Knoxville," November 18, 1865, Records of the Superintendent of Education
for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000, Reel 7, Target 2.

responded by appealing to Governor Brownlow, who forced the leader of the hostile group to apologize.²⁹

From 1865 to 1866, the FMUPC operated the majority of the city's black schools. In April 1866, it owned two buildings, operated five schools, and employed eight teachers, with a total enrollment of 300 students. In October 1866, the FMUPC reduced its number of teachers to five. Nonetheless, it started the fall term with 332 black students, with an average attendance of 186. Just over 25 percent of all the students were more than sixteen-years-old, nearly 25 percent had math skills, over 30 percent could read at advanced levels, and over 35 percent could write. The FMUPC also operated one Sabbath school, which enrolled 250 students. Overall, in the fall of 1866, black education in Knoxville appeared strong.³⁰

Table 1. School Statistics for the Freedmen's Mission of the United Presbyterian Church (FMUPC) in Knoxville, 1866-1867

Teaching and Student Body	October 1866	January 1867	May 1867
Teachers	5	4	4
Total Student Enrollment	332	198	255
Average Attendance	186	124	156
Over Sixteen Years of Age	86	34	50
Sabbath School Attendance	250	125	180

Source: "Superintendent's Monthly School Report of the United Presbyterian Mission, Knoxville," October 1866, Reel 7, Target 1; "State Superintendent's Monthly School Report," January 1867; "State Superintendent's Monthly School Report," May 1867, Reel 6, Target 2, all in Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000.

²⁹ McGranahan, *Historical Sketches*, 22-23; "Report of R. J. Creswell," September 8, 1865, Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000, Reel 7, Target 2. After the destruction of FMUPC's newly purchased government building, the mission may have moved its school temporarily into the First Presbyterian Church, which the Union army held in its possession from 1863 to 1866. In an interview from the early twentieth century, ex-slave Joseph Star from Knoxville recounted: "I've had considerable schoolin', went to my first school in the old First Presbyterian church. My teachers was white folks from the North. They give us our education and give us clothes and things sent down here from the North. That was just after the surrender." See, McDonald and Wheeler, *Knoxville, Tennessee*, 13; and Federal Writer's Project, *Tennessee Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in Tennessee from Interviews with Former Slaves* (repr., Bedford, MA, 2006), 72.

³⁰ "Report of the United Presbyterian Mission, Knoxville," April 30, 1866; "Superintendent's Monthly School Report of the United Presbyterian Mission, Knoxville," October 1866, all in Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000, Reel 7, Target 1.



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As the school year progressed, student enrollment and achievement declined. Between October 1866 and January 1867, total enrollment at the FMUPC's schools dropped 40 percent, and the average attendance dropped 33 percent. There was, moreover, a 60 percent drop in students over the age of sixteen, a 40 percent decline in advanced readers, and a nearly 50 percent drop in students who could write. The Sabbath school also suffered, dropping 50 percent in enrollment from October. In its reports, the FMUPC offered no explanation for these sudden declines, but the matter seems to have involved the establishment of a new black school in Knoxville by the Garnet League in December 1866.³¹

The Garnet League was headquartered in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. According to the Whig's description:

The league is composed solely of colored people of that city, who have associated themselves in their grand enterprise for promoting the educational and religious improvement of the freedmen, the stimulation of a higher standard of literature and civilization, by sending among them as numerous as possible their own "kith and kin" as teachers and ministers, to instruct them in all their moral and religious duties.

In early December 1866, the League sent Henrietta Jones—described as "a highly educated colored woman"—to establish the Winan School in Knoxville. It grew rapidly, so much so that by February 1867 the League had hired another teacher, Professor O.H.C. Hughes, a well-educated black leader in Knoxville. Under the direction of Jones and Hughes, the Winan School made progress "second to [that of] no Freedmen school in the state [of Tennessee]."³²

In the first half of 1867, black education in Knoxville expanded. Although several FMUPC students moved to the Winan School in late 1866, enrollment at the FMUPC's schools rebounded from its previous decline. By May 1867, total enrollment increased by nearly 30 percent, advanced readers by over 30 percent, writers by 11 percent, and Sabbath school enrollment by 44 percent since the beginning of the year. Also in May, the Winan School boasted an enrollment of 156 students and an average attendance of 104 (including two white students), with 48 over the age of 16, 71 advanced readers, 70 writers, and 150 in the League's Sabbath school. By the spring of 1867, over 400 blacks in Knoxville attended an organized school of some kind.³³

³¹ "State Superintendent's Monthly School Report," January 1867, Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000, Reel 6, Target 2; *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, February 13, 1867.

³² *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, February 13, 1867.

³³ "State Superintendent's Monthly School Report," May 1867, Records of the Superintendent

Despite the success of its education programs, in June 1867 the FMUPC reduced its presence in the city. That month, the FMUPC cut three of its day schools, leaving one in operation. Even so, the FMUPC still employed four white teachers, and maintained a high school enrollment. It is unknown what caused this sudden reduction in programs, but a lack of financial support and a shift in focus are two likely reasons. In May, the FMUPC reported that it relied on funds from the Freedmen's Bureau to transport its teachers. The use of the Freedmen's Bureau's services suggests that the FMUPC's Knoxville branch was struggling financially. Thus, the FMUPC may have eliminated three of its schools in order to cut expenses and maintain a high quality of black education. A month after dropping its schools, the FMUPC ended its reliance on the Freedmen's Bureau for transportation of its teachers, which indicates that the reductions alleviated financial stress.³⁴

The elimination of three of its city schools also indicates a shift in focus for the FMUPC. With the establishment and success of the Winan School in Knoxville, the FMUPC may have turned its attention to other locations where blacks lacked educational opportunities. This reason seems most likely, because in the latter half of 1867, the FMUPC began concentrating its efforts in the rural areas of Knox County. In August, the FMUPC operated four schools outside of Knoxville. F. Schade reported to the *Whig* that the FMUPC offered rural blacks "highly valued and appreciated" educational programs. Ultimately, the FMUPC reduced its presence in Knoxville in mid-1867 and responded to a growing demand for schools for rural blacks.³⁵

Throughout 1867, the Garnet League helped Knoxville's black community take ownership of its education. By June of that year, the Winan School held classes in the Logan Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church, a black-owned building. In September, F. Schade, again writing in the *Whig*, complimented the students of the Winan School for their dedication to learning. He described the school as doing vital work, which would cultivate a generation of educated blacks to someday lead their communities. Schade named two young men specifically, saying, "William Franklin and Jerry Jarnagon, will, if encouraged, make speakers of which any community might be proud."³⁶

of Education for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000, Reel 6, Target 2.

³⁴ "State Superintendent's Monthly School Report," May 1867; "State Superintendent's Monthly School Report," June 1867, all in Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000, Reel 6, Target 2.

³⁵ *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, August 7, 1867.

³⁶ "School Property and Repairs," June 4, 1867, Reel 6, Target 3; "State Superintendent's Monthly School Report," June 1867, Reel 6 Target 2, all in Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000; *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, September 11, 1867.

Black education in Knoxville worked. In August, Gentle—a free black man—became a member of the Knoxville at the second session on August 6, 1866. Under his leadership they passed laws on mining. One law was the appropriation of public lands for the advantages of agriculture.

Gentle's election to the Knoxville's black community in East Tennessee black community for full political and civil rights, our condition. Cimprich argued that the petition. That same year, Alfred Anderson moved from Nashville to attend the state's first black normal school in Knoxville to establish a school.

Anderson's election was significant. Just as the black community, so, the "Preachers came to the city. Anderson, along with the others, fused together religious and political between black politics.

On New Year's Day, black Knoxvilleans celebrated Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. The North and South recorded the scene.

³⁷ Booker, *Two Hundred Years*.

³⁸ John Cimprich, "South from Slavery to Freedom," Jordan, "The Freedmen's Publications 11 (1932) of Blount County, 81 (2009): 23-24.

³⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, advantage. Rev. A. were mixed race. In Knoxville's black community, Knox County, Tennessee.

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el 6, Target 3; "State Superintendent's t 2, all in Records of the Superintendent A, M-1000; *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*,

Black education was closely tied to politics. Prominent black leaders in Knoxville worked diligently to acquire state and local support for black education. In August 1866, Knoxville's black community elected M.J.R. Gentle—a free black who came to the city in the early 1850s—to represent Knoxville at the second State Convention of Colored Men held in Nashville on August 6, 1866. The convention elected him president, and under his leadership they passed resolutions on education, agriculture, manufacturing, and mining. One resolution asked the state legislature "to make annual appropriation of public school funds adequate to secure to black children the advantages of a common school education."³⁷

Gentle's election to this state convention, however, was not the first time Knoxville's black community organized politically. In April 1865, a group of East Tennessee black leaders sent a petition to the state legislature asking for full political and civil rights. They stressed that "without our political rights, our condition is very little better than it was before." Historian John Cimprich argued that Knoxville's black community likely produced this petition. That same month, the community sent William Scott and Rev. Alfred Anderson to Nashville to work for black rights. Scott remained in Nashville to attend the first State Convention of Colored Men and edit the state's first black newspaper, the *Colored Tennessean*. But Anderson returned to Knoxville to establish the Logan Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church.³⁸

Anderson's emergence as a prominent black leader in Knoxville was significant. Just as black churches had multiple functions in the black community, so, too, did black pastors. As historian Eric Foner notes, "Preachers came to play a central role in black politics during Reconstruction." Anderson, along with other black pastors including Rev. George LeVere, fused together religious leadership and political activity. This connection between black politics and religion became most apparent in early 1867.³⁹

On New Year's Day, 1867, somewhere between 1,600 and 2,000 black Knoxvilleians marched in the city's streets to commemorate President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Black communities throughout the North and South observed the anniversary with celebration. The *Whig* recorded the scene in Knoxville:

³⁷ Booker, *Two Hundred Years*, 19; Cansler, "Negro Life," 321.

³⁸ John Cimprich, "Slavery's End in East Tennessee," in *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation*, ed. John C. Inscoe (Lexington, 2001), 195; Weymouth T. Jordan, "The Freedmen's Bureau in Tennessee," *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 11 (1939): 59; Robert Glenn Slater, "A Distinctive Minority: The Black Leaders of Blount County, Tennessee During Reconstruction" *The Journal of East Tennessee History* 81 (2009): 23-24.

³⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 93. Light skin color may have given the city's black leaders an advantage. Rev. Alfred Anderson, M.J.R. Gentle, Dr. J.B. Young, and James Mason were mixed race. Even so, it is unknown to what extent skin color variations mattered to Knoxville's black community. See, U.S. Census, 1860 and 1870, Population Schedules, Knox County, Tennessee.

Headed by the colored band of this city . . . the colored people of Knoxville marched in procession through our principal streets. The procession contained several carriages filled with the speakers of the day, and banners and standards of various kinds and designs waved aloft, denoting the patriotism of the colored people and designating the various societies composing the procession. Several of the flags belonged to the disbanded colored regiments, and showed proof of having been in the storm of battle, borne by the colored defenders of the nation's perpetuity.

The procession stopped at Governor William Brownlow's Knoxville residence and gave three cheers for him, the state legislature, and Congress. The parade then moved on to cheer in front of the residence of U.S. Representative Horace Maynard, the headquarters of General Luther S. Trowbridge, and the Whig office. At each location, the crowd expressed respect and enthusiasm. The procession culminated at the Logan Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. LeVere, Gentle, and Anderson each addressed the members of the crowd and exhorted them to lives worthy of their freedom and "to fit themselves for their new and more advanced citizenship."⁴⁰

The parade showcased black Knoxvilleans as a large, strong, well-organized, diverse, and talented political and social force. Their community included musicians, gifted orators, military veterans, and civic leaders. A month after the parade, black leaders from East Tennessee met in Knoxville to encourage the state legislature to pass a bill granting black suffrage. The meeting occurred at the Logan Chapel on the evening of February 12, 1867. A majority of attendees were from Knoxville. Anderson called the gathering to order, Henderson Alexander served as the convention's president, M.J.R. Gentle served as secretary, Professor O.H.C. Hughes (a teacher with the Winan School) served as the chairman of the committee of resolutions, and Dr. J. B. Young and William F. Yardley signed the statement of resolutions.⁴¹

The resolutions passed at the meeting displayed a complex mixture of politics, religion, and education. Members praised the state legislature for standing "in defense of humanity and enfranchisement." In addition, they resolved to support both the radical wing of the Republican Party and William Brownlow in the upcoming state elections in August. But members also expressed some frustration, noting that the state's Republicans had "not secured all we may have desired—in that we are not permitted a seat in the jury box, nor allowed to hold office." In spite of their frustration, however, those at the meeting resolved to wait in the hope that one day they would "rejoice in the exercise of every right belonging to an American citizen."⁴²

⁴⁰ Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig*, January 9, 1867. Concerning the celebration of Emancipation Day on January 1, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, 2001), 305, 368-69.

⁴¹ Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig*, January 9, and February 20, 1867.

⁴² Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig*, February 20, 1867.

Religious reference to the cause of political politicians, therefore, "Resolved. That we rec this nation, and as our in a special manner our God, who in the fullne withering servitude to

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⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ William Gillespie Mc 1876" (Ph.D. diss., Van in Tennessee, 179; D Commissioner for the League in Maryville. T details about the Mary 25-46. Concerning U the 1867 elections, see Official and Political A Knoxville Whig, August

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Religious references saturated the resolutions. Participants considered the cause of political freedom nothing less than a divine cause. God, not politicians, therefore, deserved the highest praise. One resolution began, "Resolved, That we recognize the unerring hand of Providence in the affairs of this nation, and as our first and most pleasing duty, we solemnly acknowledge in a special manner our boundless obligations to the gracious and Almighty God, who in the fullness of time, has so visibly and triumphantly led us from withering servitude to enfranchised freedmen."⁴³

Attendees also expressed a commitment to black education. In their view, the progress of education was essential to securing full freedom, enlightenment, social acceptance, and prosperity. They resolved,

[T]hat education is the strong and potent shield to protect us from the arm of oppression, to [lead] our feet into the ways of freedom and usefulness. . . . [W]e will, with one accord unite our hands and hearts to shed abroad among us the gifts of mental light, that we may think right, vote right and do right, hoping by our energies, industry and economy, to acquire wealth, whereby we may add our contributions to the strength, glory and honor of the national character.⁴⁴

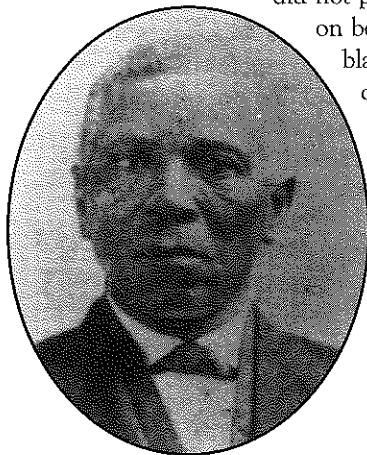
At the same time black leaders were meeting at the Logan Chapel, white Republicans throughout Tennessee began to organize black Union Leagues. The stated purpose of these leagues was "to inculcate the principles of loyalty and good citizenship" among black men; the unstated purpose was to secure black votes for the Republican Party. In April 1867, the black Union League in Knoxville boasted a membership of 500. Overall, Radical Republicans succeeded in gaining the political support of freedmen. Black suffrage, together with the disenfranchisement of ex-Confederates, led to a landslide victory for the Republicans in the 1867 state elections. They won all of Tennessee's congressional house seats, every seat in the state senate, and all but three seats in the state house. Republican William Brownlow won the governorship, with 74,034 votes, over conservative Emerson Etheridge, who obtained only 22,550 votes. In Knoxville, Brownlow triumphed with 982 votes against Etheridge's 343 votes.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ William Gillespie McBride, "Blacks and the Race Issue in Tennessee Politics, 1865-1876" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1989), 186; Patton, *Unionism and Reconstruction in Tennessee*, 179; D. Burt to W. P. Carlin, April 30, 1867, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-999, Reel 19, Target 1. The Union League in Maryville, Tennessee, was biracial—not segregated as it was in Knoxville. For details about the Maryville Union League, see Severance, "Loyalty's Political Vanguard," 25-46. Concerning Union Leagues in general, see Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 49-50. About the 1867 elections, see Alexander, *Political Reconstruction*, 159-60; Charles A. Miller, *The Official and Political Manual of the State of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1890), 170; Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig*, August 7, 1867.

By the summer of 1867, Knoxville's black community had achieved substantial progress. The community counted three churches, two of them having erected their own buildings, a number of black schools, and a strong political presence in the city and region. However, blacks in Knoxville lacked political, social, and economic stability in white society. Most obvious, blacks did not possess equal political and civil rights, they relied on benevolent organizations for education, and many black congregations lacked church buildings of their own. The city's black community responded to these challenges through political activity.



In September 1867, James Mason and other members of Knoxville's black community, held a statewide convention for black Tennesseans in Knoxville. From *Booker, Two Hundred Years*, 40.

In late August 1867, weeks after the gubernatorial election, a group of black leaders in Knoxville—including Dr. J.B. Young, Alfred Anderson, William Yardley, James Mason, and Henderson Alexander—announced a statewide convention for black Tennesseans to be held in Knoxville on September 24, 1867. The call for delegates appeared in the *Whig*. The newspaper stated, "We have carried the elections by a vast majority, yet there remains much to be done, matters connected with our future welfare and happiness to be considered, and we hope and trust that every city, county, and district will be represented by delegates." It is significant that this convention invited delegates from across the state. Only six months earlier, black leaders

in Knoxville had held a convention only for black East Tennesseans. At that point, their leadership held regional, but not statewide, appeal. But by August, the city's black leaders took unprecedented steps to achieve statewide political leadership among black Tennesseans.⁴⁶

Black education also advanced in the latter half of 1867. That summer, LeVere made plans to start a new school in the basement of the black Presbyterian Church. First, however, he needed to complete construction of the church's basement. To cover some of the expenses, the Freedmen's Bureau gave LeVere \$200. By October 22, enough of the basement had been finished for LeVere to open his school. It started with thirty-six students. By December, all but two students were paying their own tuition, allowing the school to become self-sustaining. In addition, this marked the first time (as far as available evidence indicates) that black students in Knoxville paid

⁴⁶ Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig*, August 28, 1867. Black leaders in Knoxville, including Rev. Alfred Anderson, Rev. William Howell, M.J.R. Gentle, Benjamin Williams, and W.T. Abernathy, also helped establish the State Labor School in Nashville in late 1867. The school promised to teach skills in manual labor. See, *Knoxville Daily Free Press*, October 30, 1867.

their own tuition. In which generally served each evening. In addition, independence. Earlier, finance the school's costs. The Bureau paid \$95 to the school's operating expenses. In November, however, the school's operating

Public support for the school was evident in a November report, teaching black schools in Knoxville that it was "very good." for the FMUPC, reported toward black schools. advanced greatly.⁴⁸

Knoxville's black expansion in late 1867 establish an Episcopal an effort to raise money between Asylum and the black Baptist Church for its new building in Church demonstrate. On November 6, 1867, Methodist Episcopal delegates from around a theological seminary favorable urban environment incoming students. The resolution requiring cents. Finally, as the achieved citywide expansion held a large fair in the

⁴⁷ "School Property and School," November Report, November 1867, Reel 6, Target 2. "Teacher's Monthly School Report of the Superintendent of the last report, two teaching night schools, see Ph

⁴⁸ "District Superintendent Teacher's Monthly School Report," "District Superintendent 1868, Reel 7, Target Tennessee, NARA, A

August 1867, weeks after the election, a group of black leaders including Dr. J.B. Young, Alfred William Yardley, James Mason, and Alexander—announced a statewide black Tennesseans to be held in September 24, 1867. The call for was in the *Whig*. The newspaper carried the elections by a vast majority. There remains much to be done, and we are concerned with our future welfare and the future of the state. We are considered, and we hope and trust that every city, county, and district will be represented by delegates." It is significant that the delegates invited from across the state six months earlier, black leaders for black East Tennesseans. At the time of the state appeal. But by the time of the steps to achieve statewide

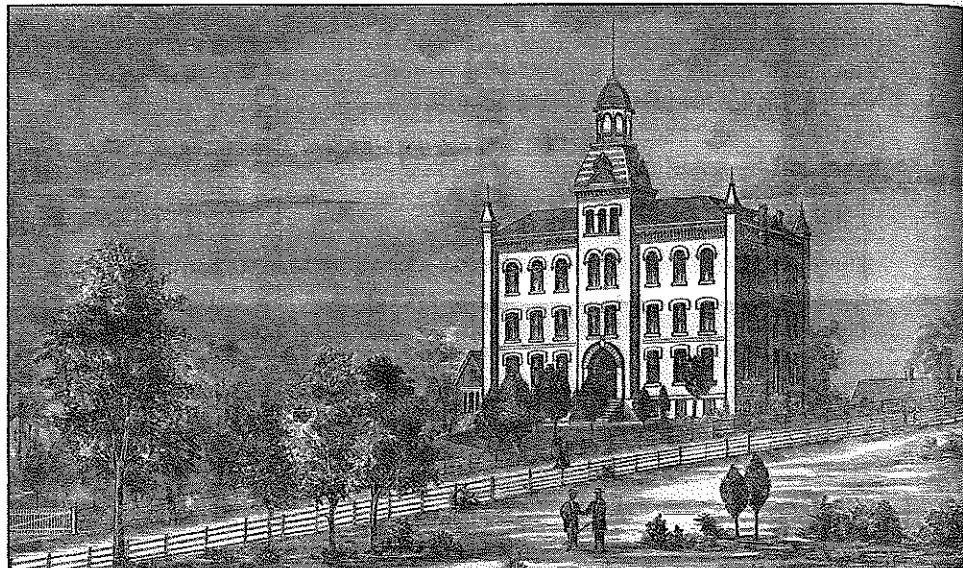
leaders in Knoxville, including Rev. Gentle, Benjamin Williams, and W.T. School in Nashville in late 1867. The *Knoxville Daily Free Press*, October 30,

Knoxville's black churches achieved new levels of independence and expansion in late 1867. In August, several blacks in the city made plans to establish an Episcopal Church. According to the *Whig*, they were "making an effort to raise means to erect a new house of worship on State [S]treet, between Asylum and Reservoir." In September, the newspaper reported that the black Baptist Church had recently celebrated the laying of the cornerstone for its new building in East Knoxville. Two months later, the black Methodist Church demonstrated that its influence had spread well beyond the city. On November 6, 1867, the Tennessee Annual Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church convened at the Logan Chapel, with sixty delegates from around the state. Conference leaders decided to establish a theological seminary in Knoxville, believing that the city offered both a favorable urban environment and a strong black community to support incoming students. To pay for the seminary's construction, leaders passed a resolution requiring every member of the denomination to contribute fifty cents. Finally, as the year came to a close, the black Presbyterian Church achieved citywide exposure. For several days in late December, the Church held a large fair in the city to raise funds to complete its basement, which

⁴⁸ "District Superintendent's Monthly School Report-Winan School," November 1867; "Teacher's Monthly School Report-Winan School," December 1867, Reel 8 (no target); "District Superintendent's Monthly School Report—United Presbyterian Mission," January 1868, Reel 7, Target 1, all in Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of Tennessee, NARA, M-1000.

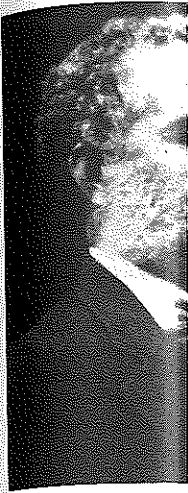
housed LeVere's school. The fair caught the attention of the *Whig*, which not only announced the event but praised its success. By the end of 1867, the growth of Knoxville's black churches represented greater levels of influence in the city and state.⁴⁹

For the next two decades—before racial violence spiked at the turn of the twentieth century—Knoxville's black community thrived. In early 1868, David Burt, Freedmen's Bureau Superintendent of Education for Tennessee, reported that at least one normal school—which educated black students interested in becoming teachers—had been established in Knoxville. By 1881 three more schools had started: Knoxville College (1875), Austin High School (1879), and the Tennessee School for the Deaf (1881). Also, by the 1880s, eight new black churches were organized: Second Colored Baptist Church (1868), Mount Pleasant Baptist Church (1872), Seney Chapel (1875), Clinton Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church (1875), First United Presbyterian Church (1877), Little Brown Church (1881), Little Zion Baptist Church (1882), and Bethel A.M.E. Church (1883). In 1886, Logan Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church erected a new house of worship on Commerce Avenue that seated nearly a thousand people. One history of Knoxville has claimed that



Founded in 1875 by the Presbyterian Church, Knoxville College began as a normal school to educate teachers and quickly become a center of black higher education in East Tennessee. From Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Knoxville College, Knoxville, Tennessee, for the Year Ending May, 1882 (Knoxville, 1882).

⁴⁹ Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig*, August 28, September 25, and December 25, 1867; *Knoxville Daily Free Press*, November 17, 1867.



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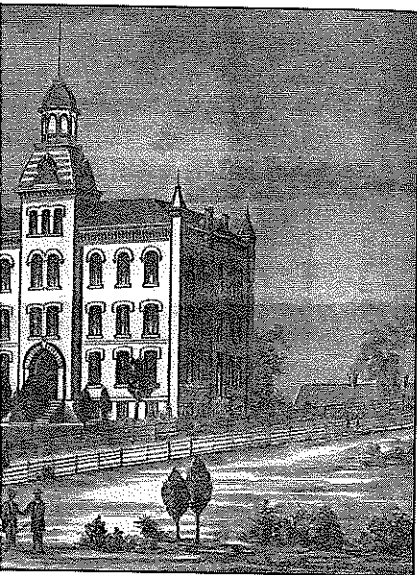
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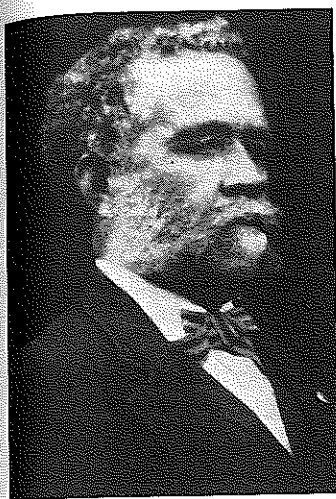
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5, and December 25, 1867; *Knoxville*



William F. Yardley, an active member of Knoxville's black community throughout the postwar period, ran for governor in 1876. From the Beck Cultural Exchange Center.

at the time of the structure's completion it was "the third largest [church building] in the United States owned by colored people."⁵⁰

Blacks also became more active in politics after 1868 when they gained the right to hold office. In 1872, prominent black leader and physician Dr. J.B. Young campaigned, although unsuccessfully, for city mayor. Four years later, William Yardley, another local black leader, ran for governor as an independent. According to Robert Booker, Yardley was "hailed by the press and public alike for his ability at public speaking . . . [and] he was noted for his eloquence in introducing visiting dignitaries who came to Knoxville." Although Yardley received only one percent of the statewide vote, his campaign demonstrated the rising influence of Knoxville's black community. For the next decade, the city's black leaders formed numerous committees to interview local political candidates, both Republicans and Democrats. Beyond education, religion, and politics, blacks made gains in other areas too. They established well-respected fraternal societies, served as policemen, practiced law and medicine, and, as early as 1871, organized labor associations.⁵¹

In the years immediately following the Civil War, Knoxville's black community flourished. While they faced numerous challenges, blacks established their own churches, advanced the cause of their education, and achieved statewide political influence. But why in Knoxville? Why did blacks succeed in the city, while in the surrounding region they faced acute prejudice? What made the city a favorable urban environment? One likely reason is that blacks in Knoxville were a minority and, thus, posed no serious social, political, or economic threat to the majority of elite and middle-class whites. Furthermore, the Republican Party benefited from the black community's support. Another likely reason that the city proved agreeable was that black freedom often profited the city's elites. Business elites in

⁵⁰ *Nashville Union and Dispatch*, February 11, 1868; Booker, *Two Hundred Years*, 23-34, 39-44; Rule et al., *Standard History*, 452. Concerning the rise of elite conservatism and the black exodus from the city in the early twentieth century, see McDonald and Wheeler, *Knoxville, Tennessee*, 34-36.

⁵¹ Booker, *Two Hundred Years*, 60-63, 85-91; Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee*, 49; McDonald and Wheeler, *Knoxville, Tennessee*, 27, 31; Taylor, *The Negro in Tennessee*, 145-46, 236. One prominent, largely elite, black fraternal gathering was the Masonic Brotherhood, Meridian Lodge, No. 4. See, *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, January 1, 1873,

Knoxville, like their counterparts in Nashville, quickly joined the New South movement. Immediately after the war, business leaders worked diligently to promote the city's economic growth. Knoxville sat at the junction of several rail connections, possessed large quantities of natural resources like iron and coal, and had access to a large labor pool (blacks and rural migrants) that could be used to fuel industrial expansion. Fixated on enlarging the city's commercial and industrial influence in the region and desperate for workers, businessmen considered blacks a greater economic advantage than a social or political threat. Nevertheless, blacks were not simply political and economic puppets. They may have benefited from favorable urban conditions, but it was their own courageous efforts to form dynamic communities immediately after the Civil War that allowed blacks to achieve varying degrees of religious, educational, and political authority in Knoxville.⁵²

⁵² McDonald and Wheeler, *Knoxville, Tennessee*, 10-31.

Deconst The 13th Cavalry and John

On October 10, 1864, the 13th Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry of the Carter County company was doubled. They had gathered in the special dedication of two days Elizabethton, Tennessee, patriotic music, residence adorned with patriotic any well-known, pivot came in killing the flat Morgan. Samuel Scott for the 13th Tennessee . . . The officers and men contended, the "cons Morgan won them "o Morgan's death came nothing short of mu with Lost Cause rheto veterans of the 13th who had perpetuated

* The author is an instru She holds a master's de

¹ "Reunion of Veterans

² Samuel W. Scott and S Cavalry, U.S.A. (1903;



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Deconstructing the Myth: The 13th Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry and the Death of General John Hunt Morgan

By Melanie K. Storie*

On October 10, 1913, in Elizabethton, Tennessee, veterans from the 13th Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry (US) posed for a photograph on the steps of the Carter County courthouse. The occasion that autumn afternoon was two-fold. They had gathered for their 17th annual reunion and to take part in the special dedication services for the new Soldiers' Monument. For two days Elizabethton celebrated the service of its veterans. Bands played patriotic music, residents waved American flags, and town buildings were adorned with patriotic bunting.¹ While the regiment did not participate in any well-known, pivotal battles during the Civil War, its defining moment came in killing the flamboyant Confederate cavalryman, General John Hunt Morgan. Samuel Scott and Samuel Angel, veterans and regimental historians for the 13th Tennessee, later wrote, "This was the first fight of importance. . . . The officers and men showed the gallantry . . . of veterans." Further, they contended, the "conspicuous part" played by the regiment in the death of Morgan won them "distinction."² Confederates nevertheless insisted that Morgan's death came as a result of an unfair fight; some even alleged it was nothing short of murder. After the war these viewpoints became meshed with Lost Cause rhetoric, elevating Morgan's image to that of folk hero while veterans of the 13th Tennessee were depicted as gratuitous bushwhackers who had perpetuated an atrocity. During the postwar years, John Hunt

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¹ "Reunion of Veterans Held at Elizabethton," *Bristol Herald Courier*, October 12, 1913.

² Samuel W. Scott and Samuel P. Angel, *History of the Thirteenth Regiment Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry, U.S.A.* (1903; repr., Johnson City, 1987), 178.