

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

Squirrel Hunters of the Civil War

The Civil War (1861-1865) was a pivotal period in American history. Ohioans played a major role in its outcome. Soon after the Confederate states seceded and war was declared, Camp Dennison became a training facility for Union soldiers. More than 50,000 recruits drilled there, with as many as 12,000 men living there at a time. Ohio was a leading Northern state in sending troops to the war front. Other Ohioans who had no military training had a role in part of the war; they were known as the Squirrel Hunters.

During the Kentucky campaign (September 1862), there was the possibility of a Confederate invasion of Ohio. Cincinnati was a major source of supplies to the Union Army and capturing it would be a remarkable feat – one which might prompt Kentucky to become a Confederate state and gain European recognition of the CSA. Southern troops, after



capturing Lexington, traveled north, led by General Henry Heth, under orders from General Kirby Smith. Both Covington and Cincinnati prepared to defend themselves. Martial law was declared, and local businesses were closed. Ohio Governor William Tod proclaimed, “Our southern border is threatened with invasion. I have, therefore, to recommend that all the loyal men of your counties at once form themselves into military companies and regiments to beat back the enemy at any and all points he may attempt to invade our state.” Ohio infantry regiments were dispatched from Camp Dennison to Cincinnati. And volunteers from 65 counties answered the governor’s call to arms. Some were provided with free railroad transportation if they came to the Queen City carrying weapons. Others traveled on foot or by horse from the backwoods of the state. They wore homemade clothing, sometimes including coonskin caps. Men of all ages who weren’t already in the military answered the governor’s plea for help. More than 150,000 men reported for duty. They arrived with “pitchforks, clubs and pistol and blunderbusses of the vintage of 1812...” Their weapons were more suited for small game hunting than armed conflict. One Confederate scout remarked that the men swarming into Cincinnati were “farm boys that never have to shoot at the same squirrel twice.” The name “Squirrel Hunters” might also be a reference to

the Confederate gray uniform, the same color as gray squirrels, which were a menace to farmers’ crops. Defending their state from gray critters was the charge of these Ohio civilians.

The volunteers slept in meeting halls, churches, and warehouses that had been converted to barracks. The Fifth Street market and women residents of the city provided free food to the men. Their commander was General Lewis Wallace. Fortifications were built around the city, and a pontoon bridge was constructed connecting Cincinnati and Covington. Squirrel Hunters crossed the bridge and dug trenches in the Bluegrass state. They drilled during the day and manned the trenches at night. By September 13, the rebel forces were withdrawing, and the two cities were no longer in danger. General Wallace was nicknamed the “Savior of Cincinnati”. The Squirrel Hunters returned to their homes and families.

The next year (1863) the Ohio legislature printed official discharge papers honoring these men for their military contributions and praising them for their service. Those discharges had depictions of General Wallace and Governor Tod, a caricature of a Squirrel Hunter, American flags, and a squirrel in a tree. Later, in 1908, Ohio paid each surviving Squirrel Hunter thirteen dollars for his one-month service during September 1862. Among those who received discharges were Silas Newton Muchmore and Andrew Jackson Muchmore, landowners in Indian Hill in 1869.

The Squirrel Hunters were instrumental in defending Cincinnati and Covington and denying any Confederate invasion. Their willingness to volunteer and their gallant efforts prevented a rebel incursion. Indeed, these citizen soldiers were patriots.

