



### **JAMES GOODHEART (1830-1913)**

James Goodheart was a big man, a strong man, who lived a long life. He was a family man with firm convictions and a life-long resident of McLean County. He was a mason and brick-layer by training and occupation and left his mark on the city. But perhaps the most colorful events of his life occurred during his years as McLean County Sheriff.

James was born seventeen miles east of Bloomington in Dawson Township on March 20, 1830. His father, William, was born in Scotland. William first found himself forced to serve in the French Navy under Napoleon. Later, he joined the British Navy during the War of 1812 and was captured in the Battle of Lake Erie. Deciding he liked what he saw here, William joined the U.S. Army and fought with them until the end of that war.

When James's parents, William and Sarah, came to McLean County, William returned to his original trade as a stonemason and bricklayer. He is said to have made the first brick in McLean County. After years of observing and assisting his father on the job, James officially entered the trade of masonry and plastering when he was 18. Except for three years in the army during the Civil War, and four years as sheriff, James worked at these trades until his retirement from work.

As a boy, James Goodheart was only able to attend school regularly until he was twelve. Then his help was needed to maintain the family farm after his father's death. Yet the skills he developed as a builder and his enterprising abilities led to "many of the public improvements of Bloomington." Among these was the area known as the "Phoenix Block." This set of seven buildings on the south side of the courthouse square seemed to rise like the phoenix of ancient myth out of the ashes of the fire of 1855 in downtown Bloomington, thanks in part to Goodheart's skills. Two sections of those buildings remain today at 106 and 108 West Washington Street.

In 1852, James married Catherine Fordice. They had twelve children, eight of whom lived to adulthood.

When President Lincoln issued his call for "more men" in 1862, James joined the 94<sup>th</sup> Illinois Volunteer Infantry which was known as the "McLean County Regiment." One of his most memorable experiences occurred in 1863 during the Siege of Vicksburg. Years later he

told this story to Madame Annette, a feature writer for the *Daily Bulletin*, Bloomington's evening newspaper. When members of his company were being picked off by sharp shooters, Goodheart was sent out with a detail to dispose of the problem. Creeping through the dark, the men came upon the snipers, and the commanding officer shot one of the seven Confederate soldiers. Assigned with three others to carry the wounded man back to camp, Goodheart learned about the Southerner's regiment and friends and family back home. He remembered "We watched, by the light of our matches, for we had not even a candle, the last gasp of the rebel soldier, who had given his life to the cause as he thought it best. It was an affecting scene, and lives in my memory today."

Back home after the war, Goodheart returned to the building trades. But in 1874 he was elected on the Republican ticket to serve as McLean County sheriff. In 1876 he became the first man to serve that office for two terms.

When he was fairly new to the office, he received a letter from a sheriff in Iowa to be on the lookout for a man named Gaddis who was wanted. The letter included a picture. The next day, when James went to church, there seated in front of him was the man in the picture. When the minister suggested they introduce themselves, the man gave his name "Gaddis." James quickly wrote the Iowa sheriff and earned an easy \$100 reward.

Several unsolved murders occurred during James' time as sheriff as well. In 1877 a popular locomotive engineer, Jim O'Neil, who lived on the West Side of Bloomington was killed. Coming home from his run at 2:30 a.m., Jim was shot as he turned the corner of Mason Street. Dwight Wheaton, a yardmaster, was accused of the crime. It appeared that Wheaton and O'Neil were in a dispute over a woman, Wheaton's wife. Later, Wheaton and his wife both accused the other of the crime. Despite the fact that Wheaton owned a revolver of the type used in the crime, and bullet casings found at the scene seemed to match it, Wheaton was eventually found "not guilty."

Another unsolved murder took place in November of 1877. The body of Albert A. Anglin was found in a meadow outside of Towanda. It appeared that the motive was robbery. The robber had taken a number of items including a pair of boots...and left his own boots in exchange. A distinctive patch on the boots led to a Bohemian immigrant, Karl O. Klusty. Before he could be arrested, Klusty fled to his native Bohemia. He was arrested there, and held for eleven months. However, due to the technicalities and expense of extradition, the case was eventually dropped.

In 1877, Goodheart also oversaw the bankruptcy of the Phoenix Nursery. This nursery once was the largest in the West, covered 600 acres of land and had 13 greenhouses. It also employed up to 250 men. The nursery was probably a victim of the Panic of 1873. During this depression, Mr. Phoenix could neither the nursery stock nor his land, so he had to declare bankruptcy.

After his two terms as sheriff, James Goodheart was appointed a Deputy U.S. Marshall and detective for the Southern District of Illinois. This made him the local representative of the federal government.

Following his years of public service, Goodheart returned to the building trades. Before the Civil War, he was a consistent anti-slavery man. He was a member of the Free Masons Bloomington Lodge, no. 43, and a member of the William T. Sherman post of the Grand Army of the Republic.

He was also an ardent Temperance man. When he was 12, he honored the promise made to his dying father and joined the Juvenile Temperance Society. He took part in Bloomington's

Whiskey War of 1854 and with 200 others, formed a Temple of Honor dedicated to ridding the county of alcohol.

James and Catherine, his wife, were devout Methodists. They belonged to the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Bloomington. He joined the church at the age of ten, and in 1908, was reported to hold the oldest membership of his church.

James died at home on December 20, 1913. He had been failing in health for some time. He is buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

**Discussion Question:** How might the outcomes of the cases faced by Sheriff Goodheart have ended differently if tried today? Why?