

MODERN WOODMEN OF AMERICA ITS EARLY BEGINNINGS IN FULTON, ILLINOIS

Mrs. Nellie (Barton) Bastian wrote a series of 20 articles published in 1923 in the Fulton Journal. The installments chronicled Fulton's history from her recollections. The articles Described in detail the relocation of the Modern Woodmen Head Office from Fulton to Rock Island and the two riots that occurred in an effort to prevent that move.

According to Mrs. Bastian a decision by the head camp in Nebraska in 1892 to move the head office met with great resistance from the citizens of Fulton. There was an injunction from the circuit court and ultimately involvement by the Governor and other courts.

The first riot on February 16, 1897 began when a "special train was chartered in Rock Island and seventy-five men, with saws and hammers with which to close up the fronts of the cases in the head clerk's office, and piles of dry good boxes for storing documents and books which they intended to move, were loaded into box cars." The office was located upstairs of the O.E. Finch building (now Johnny's Tap and owned by Paula and Dave Ensinger). The railroad track was situated directly west (currently Third Street).

In 1892, MWA, a fraternal insurance society, had a membership of 220,000 and carried insurance in the aggregate of more than \$400,000,000.00. The head office was in Fulton for 14 years beginning at 707 4th Street; the home/office of Dr. Henry M. Kennedy. The head office was moved to two other Main Street upper locations before moving to the upstairs of the Finch building.

Mrs. Bastian writes, "The visitors from Rock Island began loading (documents) in the box cars waiting. About that time, people came to the front and a very exciting part of the morning exercises took place. Two hose carts were brought into action and two lines of hose were laid, one to control the rear entrance of the office and the other in front, and the water was turned on in full force. Cold water in such quantities was too much for our midnight visitors."



The head office of the Modern Woodmen of America was in Fulton for 14 years beginning at 707 4th Street; the home/office of Dr. Henry M. Kennedy.



The Modern Woodmen head office's second location was the upstairs of the O.E. Finch building (now Johnny's Tap and owned by Paula and Dave Ensinger), and is where the riotous activities took place.

An injunction arrived delivered by Attorney Sam McCalmont halting the action. The Rock Island crowd, after completing the work of returning the documents back to the office from the box cars, went to the local saloons and “filled themselves with strong drink.”

The second riot occurred on August 13, 1897, six months later, and the tension and actions were considerably escalated. According to Mrs. Bastian in Installment #12, “A special train pulled in, consisting of two boxcars, a baggage car and three coaches. This crowd aboard was armed with revolvers, axes, hatches, knives, and about a ton of rock convenient for throwing, and a number of clubs. They were accompanied by an official surgeon of the expedition, and who came with a supply of splints and other supplies to care for the wounded. The mob began to rush out of the train and was met by John Schwab, Jr., mayor of Fulton, who commanded them to stop. They paid no heed but rushed past him. Someone struck him with a cane. City Marshal, William Bennett, drew his gun and again ordered the crowd back. He soon received several blows, one of which knocked him insensible.”

As soon as the crowd left the train they showered the Fulton people with rocks. “First, clubs, stones, hammers, axes, brickbats, and billies were used, and soon revolvers appeared.

Mayor Schwab had appointed Fred K. Bastian captain, and authorized him to select his officers. Clarence Green and W. G. Riordon were appointed first and second lieutenants S. D. Houghton, Nathaniel Green, Harry B. Noble, A. L. Van Osdel, Stephen A. Rush, James O’Rourke, Frank Hollinshead, George W. Bausan, Henry R. Schwab, J. J. Marker, Will H. Mitchell, George B. Robinson, M. R. Doran, L. D. Plank, Ed Bare, Emmett Dorsey, L. A. Dyer, Thomas Eastin, Isaac Wierenga, John Brands and Thomas Hines, sergeants. Ed Burke, Chief of Clinton police, William Dougherty, captain, and Joseph Moran, deputy sheriff, came over from Clinton and gave valuable service during the evening, as well as many other men from Clinton and Lyons.

The hose, which had proven so effective in the first raid, was again laid to stop the carrying of documents, but it was soon cut to pieces by the mob, which began carrying out the books and papers from the head office to the train. Some of Fulton’s resolute citizens began to act with firmness and a few shotguns were brought into play, and it dawned upon the strangers that they were in contact with a people who meant business, and many of them returned to their train. The closing of the saloons probably kept a great deal of harm from being committed, as on the former visit of Rock Islanders, when nearly the whole crowd became intoxicated.”

Fulton people stood firm and said: “When the supreme court of Illinois decides that the head office of MWA shall be removed from Fulton, resistance will cease in Fulton. It is a principle in Fulton that the weakest man shall be protected in the possession of what belongs to him, but that no armed mob must invade the city at any time for any purpose. Another reason to “Celebrate Fulton.” The courts ruled in favor of the relocation in 1898 and a peaceful, orderly transfer of the head office was achieved.

Mrs. Nellie Bastian was the wife of Fred K. who was owner/published of the Fulton Journal. He was deputized during the raids so her observations/recollections were up close and personal. Wayne Bastian, a local historian, was a nephew of Fred and Nellie Bastian.