

# Brooks-Baxter War

As the 1872 elections approached, the Republican Party was split between the old Radical Republicans and the new Liberal Republicans. Each side nominated a candidate; Joseph Brooks by the Liberals and Elisha Baxter by the Radicals. When the election returns were reviewed by the general assembly, Baxter was declared the winner.

Brooks filed suit to have the results reversed, but the proceedings moved slowly. Finally, on April 12, 1874, over a year after Baxter took office, the election results were overturned in a hearing where no Baxter lawyers were present. Brooks and a group of armed supporters went to the State House and forcibly evicted Baxter.

Both sides called for militia support and both calls were answered. The Brooks forces were in defensive positions around the State House; the Baxter forces had them surrounded. Baxter established a headquarters in the Anthony House, a hotel a block from the State House.

On April 16<sup>th</sup> firing broke out between the forces along Markham Street. Accounts differ on the event, but the Brooks forces fired on the Anthony House and one man was killed and several wounded. After a half-hour of suspense tensions eased. Both camps continued to prepare for further conflict. The Brooks forces managed to sneak in 2,000 Springfield rifles and 13,000 rounds of ammunition. They also continued to improve defensive positions. The Baxter forces had grown to over 1,300.

On April 30<sup>th</sup> Baxter forces ambushed Brooks' south of Pine Bluff. At least nine of Brooks' men were killed and 30 wounded. On May 8<sup>th</sup>, hoping to intercept a boatload of arms reportedly bound for Brooks, Baxter sent the steamboat Hallie and a company of militia north on the Arkansas River. Near a bend on the Arkansas River near the mouth of Palarm Creek Brooks' militia attacked the Hallie. Several were killed on both sides and the boat was disabled and captured by Brooks' forces – Baxter saboteurs sank it the next day. Baxter's forces had been firing muskets at the State House from across the river in Argenta (now North Little Rock). By May 9<sup>th</sup> the harassing fire had gotten so bad Brooks forces announced that unless it ceased they would shell the city. Skirmishes on the 10<sup>th</sup> resulted in the death of one of Brooks' men and the wounding of two. On May 13<sup>th</sup> skirmishes broke out near the current State Capitol between Baxter's militia who had arrived by boat from Fort Smith and Brooks' forces sent to prevent them from reinforcing Baxter. The fighting lasted four hours. The number of casualties is unknown.

Until that time, the United States forces in Little Rock had only been trying to keep the situation from escalating. Both sides had appealed to President Grant for recognition of their claim to the office of governor. Finally, on May 15<sup>th</sup>, President Grant recognized Baxter as the duly elected governor, ordered "all turbulent and disorderly persons to disperse and return to their homes" and noted that it was lawful for the President "to employ such part of the land and naval forces as shall be judged necessary for the

purpose of suppressing such insurrection".

By the 16<sup>th</sup> Brooks' forces had begun the return to their homes. Governor Baxter convened a constitutional convention and Arkansas's current constitution was approved, signifying an end to reconstruction.