

COLONEL FERDINAND HAVIS

RECONSTRUCTION: BROOKS-BAXTER WAR

COLONEL FERDINAND HAVIS was born a slave on 15 November 1846 in Desha County, Arkansas, the son of his slavemaster, John Havis. When he was very young he moved to Jefferson County and grew into manhood. Havis received his education in the common schools of the day and eventually became a barber by trade.

Following the close of the Civil War, Arkansas entered the era of Reconstruction. Most Black citizens allied themselves with the Republican Party, the party of the great Emancipator Abraham Lincoln. In 1871, Ferdinand Havis was elected to serve as an Alderman for the City of Pine Bluff, an office he held for two years. With the election of 1872, he was elected to represent Jefferson County in the Arkansas State Legislature. The election split the Republican party, of which Havis had become a prominent Black member. Elisha Baxter was the candidate of the mainline Republicans, whereas Joseph Brooks was nominated for governor by the Liberal Republican faction of the party. In an election marked by fraud on both sides, Baxter was declared the winner. Brooks refused to accept defeat and immediately filed legal proceedings to have the election results reversed. The proceedings dragged on slowly.

In the meantime, Baxter mobilized the state militia to defend his claim to the governorship. He named former Confederate General Robert C. Newton as his commander. Newton named as his deputies former Confederate Generals Thomas J. Churchill and T.P. Dockery. Governor Baxter also commissioned Ferdinand Havis as a Colonel in the State Militia. On the other side, Brooks appointed former Union General Robert F. Catterson as his commander. Most of the militiamen on both sides were Black.

By 15 April 1874, Brooks was ready to make his move. An armed coup d'etat ensued. Accompanied by the Pulaski County Scheriff and armed supporters, Brooks evicted Governor Baxter from the State House and seized control of the government. Soon a line of breastworks was thrown up around the buildings in the State House yard and were patrolled by armed

sentries. For a month the two forces faced each other with Federal troops between. A number of skirmishes and incidents occurred, but as the conflict continued Baxter's forces outgrew those of Brooks and represented the better elements of the people.

Finally, on 15 May 1874, one month after it began, the Brooks-Baxter War ended when President U.S. Grant recognized Baxter as the legitimate governor of Arkansas. The Brooks militia disbanded immediately. The Baxter militia was also demobilized. With the end of the Brooks-Baxter War, Reconstruction came to a close in Arkansas.

Ferdinand Havis returned to Pine Bluff and was again elected Alderman of the City of Pine Bluff, where he served until 1882. That year he was elected Circuit Clerk. Havis was a very prominent member of the Republican Party. He was elected to the Republican National Convention as a delegate from Arkansas in 1880, 1884, and 1888. He stood by President Grant at his nomination. Finally, he was elected to the United States Senate in 1887 by the Arkansas Legislature.

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